STREET & SMITH'S

# MYSTERY

MAGAZINE

UNUSUAL DETECTIVE STORIES

10¢ MARCH 1942

## "SIX HEADS ON A STRING"

A baffling complete novel
*by* ***MARK HARPER***

NOVELETTES AND STORIES BY
ALAN HATHWAY • JACK STORM
GARY BARTON • ROBERT C. BLACKMON

ALL STORIES COMPLETE

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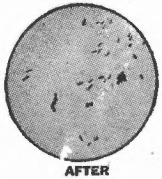

AFTER

## NOTE HOW LISTERINE GARGLE REDUCED GERMS

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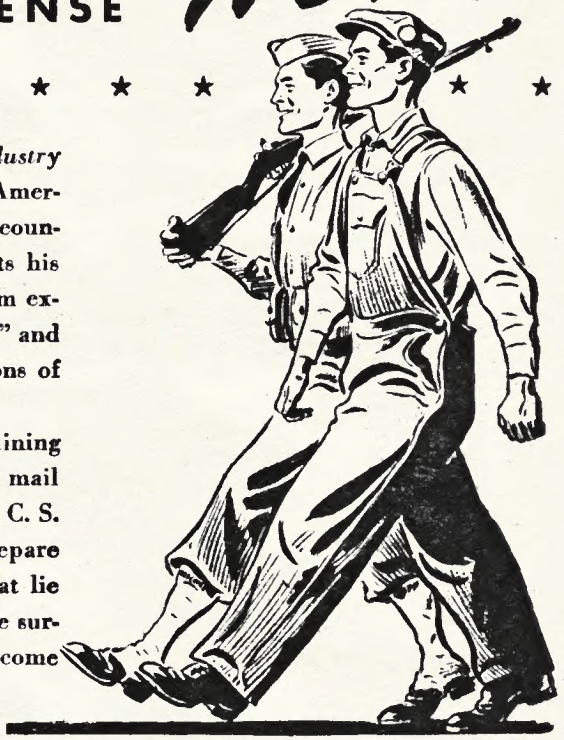

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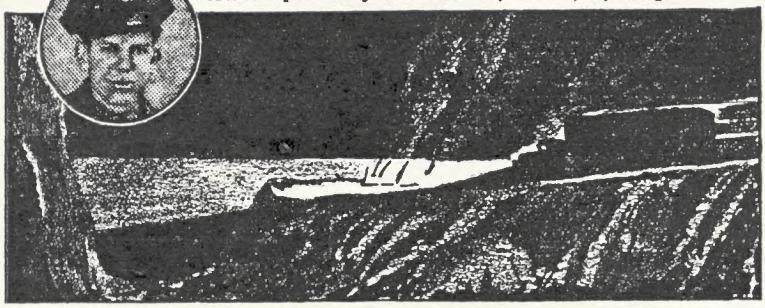
MYS—1P

# "I RODE A JUGGERNAUT DOWN A CHUTE-THE-CHUTE!"

*A true experience of* L. S. VANDIVER, *Laramie, Wyoming*



**"A WINDING RIBBON** of glassy ice faced me as I nosed my big Diesel truck down Telephone Canyon, near Laramie, Wyoming, one dark winter night," writes Mr. Vandiver. "Behind me, on a twenty-eight foot trailer, rode 27,000 pounds of freight.

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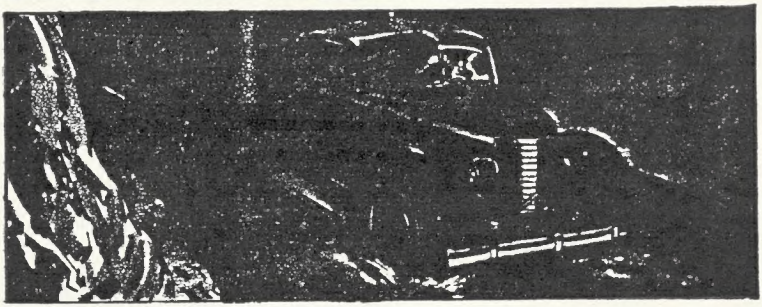

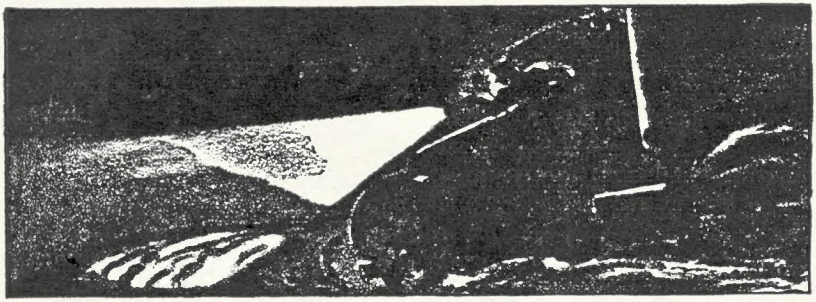

**"I WAS SKIDDING TOWARDS ETERNITY** when I remembered my flashlight. Its bright beam flooded the road ahead. Thanks to 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries, I drove the six miles safely, saving not only my life, but the $12,000 truck and its 13½ ton cargo.

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STREET & SMITH'S

# MYSTERY

MAGAZINE

UNUSUAL DETECTIVE STORIES

CONTENTS FOR MARCH, 1942 VOL. VIII NO. 1

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COMPLETE NOVEL

**SIX HEADS ON A STRING . . . . By Mark Harper . . 9**

They glared at each other, this strange creature and the three young people in evening clothes: the jungle and fashionable civilization—and between them lay the body of a dead man, with the head half cut off! A head-hunter was loose in this palatial mansion! Would another head be added to his string of trophies?

NOVELETTES

**THE HUNTER FROM BEYOND . . . Jack Storm . . . . 44**

When he found the dead man with a tomahawk embedded in his skull, Corporal Calhoun of the State police just grunted. He didn't believe that thousand-year-old Indian skeletons could rise up and murder at will. And yet, before he found a modern-day killer named Malloy, Calhoun was ready to believe nearly anything!

**MURDER FOR A MILLION . . . . Gary Barton . . . . 61**

A formula worth a million dollars was pretty strong bait for crooks—and John Boles knew it. And four other men knew it, too. That's what brought Boles to his factory in the midst of a terrific storm—to see if his bait would attract fishermen of death!

**DEATH RIDES A HEARSE . . . . Robert C. Blackmon . 80**

"No, doctor, I'd never expected to be in a hearse until—well, I died. There's nobody who wants to shoot me, that I know of. I don't understand it!" Neither did Douglas True, M. D., as he stood in the middle of a rain-soaked highway listening to the girl's explanation. Female screams from a dead wagon, with a live corpse —that's what Doc Trouble came up against on a rainy night!

SHORT STORY AND DEPARTMENT

**DEAD MEN WALKING . . . . . Alan Hathway . . . 99**

When Joe Borlund saw a man rise from the grave and actually walk into the jungle, he never thought he could have a more startling experience—but he was to run into even greater surprises!

**BEHIND THE CURTAIN . . . . . 6**

Notes on our stories and authors.

All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE MARCH 4th 10c per COPY 50c A YEAR

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# BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Mark Harper, who's given us many a good novel in this magazine in the past, comes through with another good one, "Six Heads on a String," which leads off this banner issue. Head-hunters and society don't mix so easily; the chances are that a few heads may be lost, literally. So, when the swanky guests of an explorer sneak into the room which he holds secret, and find themselves face to face with an actual head-hunter, apparently practicing his calling, they've got something to worry about! You won't have to worry while you're reading the story, but we'll just make a little bet with you that you won't be able to keep the goose pimples from rising as you turn the pages! Start this complete novel on page 9 of this issue.

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Do you want some really special mystery reading? You can't do any better than by picking up a copy of the *Detective Story Annual for 1942,* now on all newsstands. In this large-sized, well-bound book you'll find half a dozen complete novels, the outstanding stories of the past year or two, and all of them for the small price of twenty-five cents. You'll read them not once, but many times, and you'll keep the book on your library table as a fine ornament, too. Get your copy.

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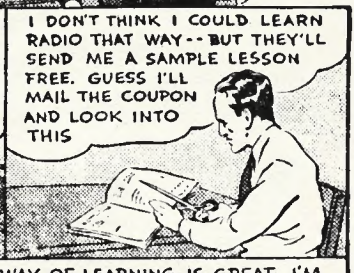
We haven't got enough room here to tell you all about the stories in this issue, much less go into detail about the ones in our next one, except to say that every one of them, in this and the next, is really a swell yarn. "The Hunter From Beyond," "Murder for a Million," "Dead Men Walking," and "Death Rides A Hearse," are all by authors you know and like, so you can be sure of a treat.

Our next issue will start off with the complete novel, "Murder Nightmare," which is as interesting as it sounds, and will be followed by a new Ballard story, "A Toast To Crime," another yarn, "The Flaming Scimitar," by Wallace Brooker, and more good ones. After you enjoy this issue, you'll surely not want to miss the next one!

# HOW A FREE LESSON STARTED BILL ON THE WAY TO A GOOD RADIO JOB

I HAVEN'T HAD A RAISE IN YEARS -- GUESS I NEVER WILL -- I'M READY TO GIVE UP
BUCK UP, BILL, WHY NOT TRY AN INDUSTRY THAT'S GROWING -- WHERE THERE'S MORE OPPORTUNITY

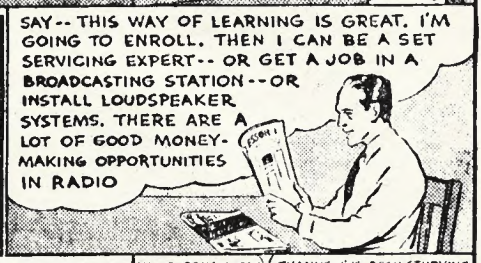
LOOK AT THIS - RADIO IS CERTAINLY GROWING FAST -- AND THE NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE SAYS THEY TRAIN MEN FOR RADIO RIGHT AT HOME IN SPARE TIME


I DON'T THINK I COULD LEARN RADIO THAT WAY -- BUT THEY'LL SEND ME A SAMPLE LESSON FREE. GUESS I'LL MAIL THE COUPON AND LOOK INTO THIS

## *Find out how Practical it is to*

# TRAIN AT HOME FOR GOOD RADIO JOBS

## *Mail Coupon - Sample Lesson FREE*


SAY -- THIS WAY OF LEARNING IS GREAT. I'M GOING TO ENROLL. THEN I CAN BE A SET SERVICING EXPERT -- OR GET A JOB IN A BROADCASTING STATION -- OR INSTALL LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEMS. THERE ARE A LOT OF GOOD MONEY-MAKING OPPORTUNITIES IN RADIO
LESSON 1

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Here is a quick way to more pay. Mail the Coupon. Find out how it is possible for you to make $5 to $10 a week extra in spare time a few months from now. Examine my Sample Lesson—read it—see how easy it is to understand—how practical it is for you to learn Radio at home in your spare time. There is an increasing demand for Radio Technicians and Operators. Many make $30, $40, $50 a week. Right now the Radio industry is enjoying a big demand for civilian Radio equipment, and in addition is getting millions of dollars worth of Government orders. Clip the Coupon and mail it. Find out how I train you at home in spare time to be a Radio Technician.

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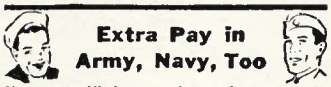
YES, I HAVE A GOOD FULL TIME RADIO JOB NOW -- AND A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD IN RADIO




Every man likely to go into military service, every soldier, sailor, marine, should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to 6 times a private's base pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. IT'S SMART TO TRAIN FOR RADIO NOW!

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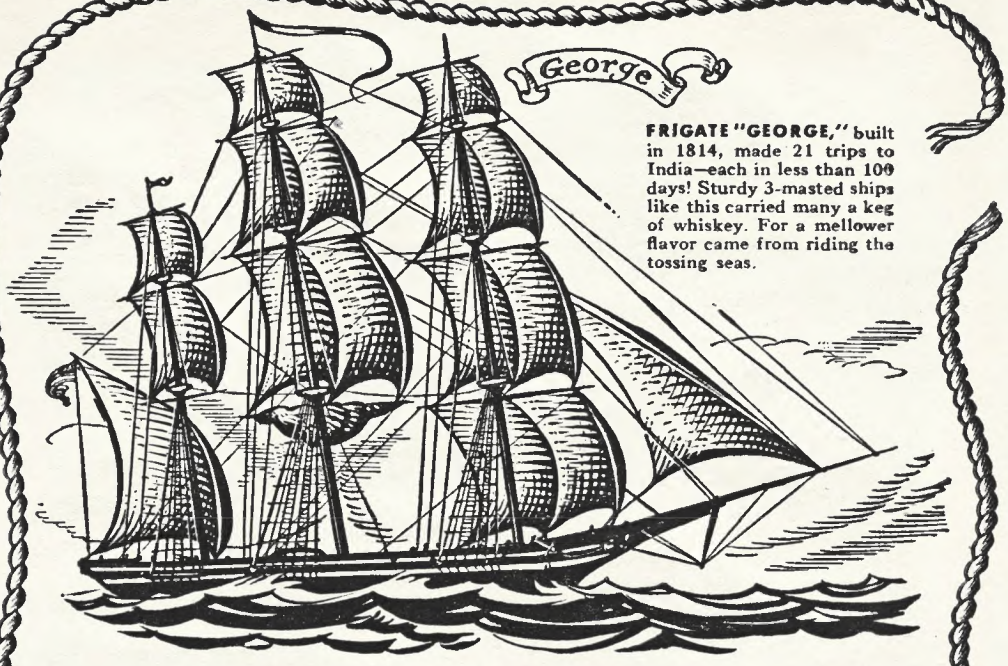


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# MR. BOSTON ROCKING CHAIR BLENDED WHISKEY

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*Four heads were on it already, the fifth in preparation. Which among these fashionable society people would complete the*

# SIX HEADS ON A STRING

**A Complete Novel**

**by Mark Harper**

## CHAPTER I.

### FARSTONE'S RETURN.

The great salon of John Farstone's secluded house was ablaze with lights. The explorer had only recently returned from the South American wilds, and his wife was giving the reception in his honor, having invited a small group of wealthy friends and a scientist whom she had known for some years.

That there was only one scientist was probably explained by the fact that Farstone's expeditions had never yielded a great deal of scientific information. Fortune hunter he was called more often than explorer, and it was said that all of his money came from the trophies he had found in strange places.

A lot of other things were said about him, dark and sinister rumors involving the deaths of men who had accompanied him into the jungles; but none had come to light, and no crime was proved against him. Sardonic and cold, John Farstone was a man of mystery to some; to others, he was a figure of menace.

Notwithstanding the ugly rumors, however, it could not be gainsaid that his fortune hunting was profit-

able, to judge from evidences in his big home.

Ruth Acosta, crossing the room with Professor Hale toward their hostess, thought of this as her eye caught the diamonds flashing from Mrs. Farstone's ample bosom. But Ruth had other matters to occupy her mind just then, and her dark eyes were brilliant with excitement and suppressed dread.

Ruth's brother, Miguel, had just arrived from South America and had told her that he, too, would be present this evening—and that filled her with much concern. Ruth had heard of the unexplained deaths of Farstone's first two assistants.

Following their deaths, a year or two apart, Miguel had been the third to join the explorer, and Ruth had been relieved when she had learned of his safe return to their home in Brazil.

But now, suddenly, Miguel had come to New York, and her intuition told her that he had some unusual reason for following John Farstone home. Her misgivings had doubled when Miguel warned her not to disclose that they were brother and sister. Miguel had had time only to phone, and he had not explained.

The deception would not be difficult. They had racial resemblance, but it ended there. Ruth had used her mother's name, Acosta, while in college. Miguel was known to Farstone merely as Miguel Portas. But the warning had stirred Ruth greatly. She was afraid for Miguel.

She was no ordinary girl, this Ruth Acosta. The college life had concealed much of her character, but beneath the satiny-smooth, olive skin was still something of a tigress if sufficiently aroused by threat of danger; and she had more than once experienced that with Miguel in the wilds of their homeland.

"We are early, Mrs. Farstone," Professor Hale was saying. He introduced Ruth and the two young men, Eric and Max, friends who had come with them.

"I am glad of that," Mrs. Farstone said. "I am terribly worried. I can't talk with John and I must speak with someone."

"Nothing bad, I hope."

The two young men strolled away. Ruth didn't.

"It's about John. Something has happened to upset him. A man is coming tonight he doesn't want to see. I would say 'afraid' to see, but John is afraid of nothing. I am fearful something awful may happen!"

The man of science laughed reassuringly. "Perhaps you are borrowing trouble."

"Let me tell you. Of course, you know those terrible stories they told about John when, first, David Mansfield didn't return, and then, later, Jim Hastings?"

"Envious people always gossip," Hale answered. "Those two expeditions made him rich, and he must have been to great risk to get what he brought back. An explorer is always in danger, which he shares with his companions."

"Danger and trouble both," the blond Mrs. Farstone murmured. "I know something is hanging over his head all the time, but he is so secretive, he tells me nothing. He has that laboratory downstairs he told me never to enter. I'm dying to, but I don't dare, and it's always nailed up when he is away."

"Perhaps he has some snake venoms there."

Mrs. Farstone's face was suddenly white, and she shuddered.

"It is worse than that," she almost

whispered. "This time, John brought back with him a native from one of the tribes, and I know he's up to some horrible work!"

"How do you know?"

"I . . . I peeked one day, when that man went in. John keeps him in his quarter, and he goes only between his room and that laboratory."

"What did you see?"

The blond lady strained her hands down over her face, then looked up with wide eyes.

"I only hope to Heaven I didn't see what I thought I saw, and what has haunted me ever since." She caught Hale's arm. "Tell me; Jim Hastings was very light, wasn't he, with curly, fair hair?"

Hale stared at her. Then, glancing beyond her shoulder, he abruptly smiled and said: "Good evening, Farstone. You see I'm prompt, and curious."

Even Ruth's keen ears had not heard the approaching step, but some sixth sense had warned her and she was already studying the explorer as he came to them.

Farstone's well-proportioned figure was gaunt, a penalty, no doubt, for his many years in the tropics. His walk was like that of a jungle cat. His lean face was made to appear longer by the pointed beard. The tips of his ears were pointed, too, and that, with the ironic smile on his thin lips, made him seem satanic.

"I don't know on what lines your curiosity runs, Hale," he answered, "but I think we shall be able to satisfy you." He glanced sidewise at Ruth, with his lips twisted in what might have been intended for a smile, but his steel-gray eyes were cold and studying her speculatively. Hale named her to him.

"Come, my dear," Farstone said abruptly. "While my wife is entertaining Hale with her ghost stories, I'll give you a peek at some of my things."

Ruth went with him eagerly. It was strange, she thought: Mrs. Farstone feared for this man striding beside her, while her fear was of him and for her brother Miguel. She wondered if there might not be a third menace threatening both. She had witnessed such things in the jungle.

They left the salon by the far end, went halfway down a corridor and Farstone unlocked a door, switched on a light and taking Ruth's arm, urged her to enter.

His grip was not tight, but she sensed the strength in the lean fingers, and stopped just inside the threshold, partly to loosen it, partly to let her eyes roam over strange and familiar objects that crowded it.

Animals, birds and even reptiles seemed everywhere, in such lifelike pose and appearance that Ruth remarked upon it.

"I do most of the taxidermy myself," the explorer informed her. "It's a hobby of mine. But here is something I have not yet mastered, although I might in time."

He laughed, but it was a grating sound on Ruth's sensitive ears. He turned her a little and gestured toward one wall, where there was a high mantel above a built-in safe. Strung on a cord beneath the mantel were four objects not much bigger than large oranges that, at a little distance, might have passed for children's puppets.

Once before in her life Ruth Acosta had seen one such object, and had not since forgotten her sudden horror. She recognized them for what they were and felt herself gripped by the same sensation. But,

in time, she recalled the advisability of pretending ignorance.

"Heavens!" she gasped, and very realistically. "What are they?"

"Hand-picked specimens, my dear," Farstone answered lightly, "of the head-hunters' art. Perfect specimens, I should say, and I'm rather up on this sort of thing, having followed the whole process from the hunt, the decapitation, down to the finished product as you see it here."

Ruth shivered, in spite of herself, and made no effort to restrain the feeling.

"This is probably one of the finest collections in the world," Farstone went on coolly. "When it is complete, I will show it to a friend or two, then probably present it to a museum."

Ruth felt the blood drain from her heart by sudden fear, but with a struggle of self-control, steadied herself.

"N-not complete?" she stammered.

"Not quite." Farstone laughed, a little harshly. "There will be six. A fifth is already in process. The sixth, at this moment, is no doubt wandering around where nature placed it."

There was a table opposite the mantel and before it were two chairs. Ruth sank into the nearer one to hide the trembling of her legs.

"I . . . I think you brought me here to frighten me."

"Not at all," the explorer assured her, but she watched him keenly as, stooping, he worked the combination and opened the safe.

From a compartment he took an object about ten inches in height, wrapped in a brownish cloth of fine texture, which brought a quick, almost startled glance from the girl. Then she looked away, and when Farstone turned from the safe toward her, there was nothing to be learned from her expression.

A moment before, when Farstone had spoken so lightly of his string of heads, she had felt suffocated with fear and could barely restrain herself from rushing out of the room. Now, the primitive elements of her nature were beginning to reassert themselves, and the thought flashed through her mind that if this satanic gentleman had any idea of adding Miguel's black, curly head to his prized collection, she herself would kill him as quickly as she would stamp on a viper.

Fear left her entirely. Outwardly calm, she set herself to discover what she could.

Farstone came to the table beside her, laid down the cloth-wrapped object with a little metallic thud as it struck the wood. He took the chair facing Ruth.

Turning, he picked up a Malay creese from the table and let his fingers caress the keen, wavy blade as he talked.

"I am thoroughly primitive," he said. "During the past several years, I have spent only one out of each twelve-months period in so-called civilization. I have not the slightest use for its travesty on justice and its squeamish abhorrence when it is necessary that a man should be killed."

"Why do you tell this to me?" Ruth asked.

There was a fierce light in the eyes Ruth looked into, but they were hard and inscrutable and told her nothing of her growing suspicion that in some way the explorer had made a guess at her identity. For why else had he brought her here?

"I think," he said slowly, "I have acquired the jungle sense of anticipating something about to happen.

It tells me there will be strange doings here this evening—strange for civilization. Listen," he said sharply, and tossed the creese back to the table, with a ringing of fine steel.

"I do not kill wantonly, but, like the savage, I know how to revenge myself for an attack on me." He turned and stretched a long arm toward the gruesome things beneath the mantel.

"That second head from the left—the one with lighter skin than the rest—that is all that remains of a man who sought what I had found. His name was—David Mansfield. The fifth, when it joins the string, is a memento of such another. And the sixth, my dear, will also be a deadly enemy!"

Ruth kept her gaze steady against his blazing stare and, unconsciously, a light grew in her own eyes, a flame of hot resentment; for she could guess now where all this was leading.

"I know what you are thinking," he cried. "The law. Bah! Who can disprove my story? The heads of Mansfield and Hastings mean nothing except to confirm what I tell. But we are not in the jungle now, and it is because of that law I am telling you that I shall resist if attacked, and warning you to observe that fact."

Suddenly, he smiled. With a slight gesture, he rose gracefully from the chair.

"Go now, my dear. The guests will be here, and I shall join you presently."

He turned and walked with her to the door, and Ruth went out. But in the corridor, alone, she shivered slightly, for in Farstone's quick turn, his coat had been brushed aside and she saw at his belt a knife hilt, the mate of the Malay creese.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE BRONZE IMAGE.

The guests were assembled, as Farstone had surmised, and almost at once Ruth saw her brother, Miguel. Tall, dark, distinguished-looking, she thought with a little glow of pride, that was immediately succeeded by a wave of fear which she would never have felt for herself.

He was crossing the room slowly, pausing to speak with acquaintances he had made on an earlier visit here, when he had first come into contact with the explorer. Ruth observed his direction and moved beside their hostess.

"Let me introduce Mr. Waldo Fleming, Miss Acosta," Mrs. Farstone said. "Waldo is Mr. Farstone's nephew and makes his home with us, but he is so helpful to me, I also claim him."

Ruth nodded to a watery-eyed young man whose vacant expression and loose-lipped mouth made her question his ability to be of much help to anyone.

"I do all the little errands around here," Waldo said, quite seriously, and Ruth tried not to smile too broadly.

Mrs. Farstone turned to shake hands with Miguel Portas, and Ruth noticed that while she seemed very cordial, she was also nervous. She asked almost at once where Miguel was stopping. Ruth turned her head, so not to appear too interested, and saw that Waldo was watching Miguel with his vacant stare.

A moment later, Miguel stepped aside to talk to Professor Hale, and then John Farstone entered and at once became the center of attention.

The explorer had his cloth-wrapped object under one arm, and after coolly exchanging greetings,

he stepped to a small table set against one wall, and with a gesture of his free hand arranged his little audience in a semicircle before him.

Ruth took advantage of the general movement to slip among those nearest him, noting that Miguel was standing in the middle of the bent line and, therefore, directly opposite Farstone as he faced outwardly.

The explorer was taking his time, with a deliberation that rasped Ruth's taut nerves, slowly unwrapping the cloth and letting his eyes wander from face to face, passing Miguel Portas without even a glance of recognition that Ruth could notice.

"You will forgive me," he was saying in his most ironic manner, "if I allow no hands but my own to touch this little bauble." He paused on the last layer, and Ruth, flashing a glance at her brother, saw that his eyes were fixed, with a curious expression of triumph, on the thing Farstone was handling.

"I assure you," the explorer continued, "in my many years of exploration and research, this is by far the most important and valuable relic I have yet discovered!"

Again he paused, and Ruth had the feeling he was doing it deliberately, to heighten curiosity or to bait someone on, and noting the effect on Miguel, she was certain of the latter.

"Just a moment, John," Mrs. Farstone suddenly intervened. She turned to the watery-eyed nephew. "Waldo, please see that the last of the servants have left the salon and that the doors to the kitchen are locked."

The young man hesitated, his lips parted as if about to say something; then he appeared to get her meaning, and Ruth watched his retreating figure with its uncertain walk.

Farstone waited a moment, then threw off the last wrapping with a little flourish, and was greeted by an involuntary chorus of disappointment and disbelief.

From all but one. Miguel Portas took a step forward, with a sharp exclamation. His eyes were wide and shot with sudden anger.

"Will you let me take that bronze a moment, Farstone?" he asked hoarsely.

"Ah!" the explorer exclaimed delightedly. "My good friend Portas has seen something in this little image which you others have missed! No," he added coldly. "As I said at the outset, I will give it into no other hands.

"Look at it, by all means, Portas." Farstone held it higher, a crude representation in bronze of a small, apish figure. "I believe it is from some branch of the Incas. Possibly you have some ideas about it."

Miguel Portas' dark eyes were following the bronze avidly, as Farstone's hand moved it about. His whole wiry body was tensed.

"I know little of its very old history," he said, in a voice he made obvious effort to control, "but if I am right in recognizing it, it is stolen property, Farstone."

The explorer shrugged.

"Without doubt, Portas," he answered sarcastically. "And probably many times since it was cast."

Portas moved another step nearer. He seemed to have forgotten the people on either side of him, everyone and everything in the salon except that object which Farstone was holding so tantalizingly before him.

"If you would only let me have it in my hands for a moment, Farstone," he murmured, as if unaware of speaking his thought aloud. "If

I could see it close. There is a certain mark that would make me sure."

John Farstone shook his head, then turned more toward the other guests, who were becoming nervous and tense under the strange situation.

The soft opening and closing of a door caught Ruth's attention. She turned her head and saw the watery-eyed Waldo in the act of locking the door of the serving entrance to the salon. With mouth loosely open, he tiptoed quietly toward the group. No one else seemed to notice his coming.

Ruth was glad of the moment's interruption of her thoughts. She, too, had sensed what she knew was gripping her brother Miguel; and she had begun to fall under the same spell of Farstone's tantalizing, taunting manner. He was inviting attack, and Ruth alone knew it.

She glanced swiftly across to the other side of the semicircle, where her two young men friends, Max and Eric, were standing. She met the look of one and tried to signal a warning. He nodded back.

"It is, of course, a symbol," Farstone was coolly explaining, "of an ancient cult. But it is more than that. Its workmanship shows an advance in the arts and crafts and a knowledge of metals not generally accredited to that particular civilization."

"I don't care to hear a lecture on it!" Miguel Portas suddenly burst out. "I am becoming more certain it is exactly what I believed it to be—an heirloom of my own family, which you have stolen! In which case, I shall take it back from you, Farstone."

"A daring statement," Farstone said, quite unruffled, "and one I shall prove before these good people here to be entirely false."

Portas' black eyes flashed. He moved quickly, and Mrs. Farstone, who was beside him, caught his arm.

"Please, Mr. Portas," she implored.

He shook off the touch but remained where he was, a step in advance of the others. Farstone continued to look at him and the sardonic, mocking smile twitched his mouth wide.

"I shall not leave it to the word of either of us," he said calmly. "You assert you know all about this small trinket?" he asked Portas directly.

"I certainly do," Portas answered between clenched teeth.

"Very well. I will put the matter to a very simple test." Farstone's cold glance ranged the group of tensed faces. "I will request you merely to observe our impetuous young friend's expression. As you have noted, he is forewarned."

He spread the brownish cloth on the table, turned so that his back was to his audience with the exception of Ruth, who watched every movement of the clever hands.

In a few moments, Farstone stepped from the front to one side of the table and faced around. His left hand was holding the base and the body of the image; his right held the head and a portion of the neck. His eyes fixed themselves triumphantly on Portas, whose eyes and lips were wide with an expression of bewildered surprise that could not be concealed.

"It is evident to all, even to yourself, Portas," Farstone cried mockingly, "how wrong you were. But I will show you still further your complete ignorance of it."

"I am *not* wrong," Miguel Portas mumbled. "It was always in the hands of the priests—"

Ignoring the remark, Farstone upended the greater portion of the bronze above the dark brownish cloth. An amazing stream of scintillating jewels cascaded forth—emeralds, diamonds, rubies. And it seemed never-ending, piling up the price of a king's ransom on the cheap cloth.

There was a chorus of cries and gasps of wonder and amazement; but above all, one cry rang clear.

"Great Heaven!" Portas suddenly screamed, and sprang forward.

Ruth threw herself toward Farstone, but before her were the two young men, Eric and Max. Portas' tall, wiry form crashed against them and seemed to rebound a little. He gathered himself for another assault; then Mrs. Farstone clutched his arm with both hands, trying to drag him back.

"Mr. Portas!" she cried. "Restrain yourself! You forget where you are!"

Either the voice or the grip on his arm caught his attention. He glared around, saw the frightened guests moving precipitously backward, the desperate terror on Mrs. Farstone's face.

Abruptly, he covered his face with both hands, his long fingers clenched in his scalp. He turned aside, broke through the circle and moved blindly away. Ruth did not watch to see where he went; she turned the other way.

John Farstone had not moved from his position, but Ruth noted that his right hand had set the bronze on the table and was resting lightly on his hip. She caught an expression in his eyes of anger and what she thought was disappointment, as well. He began to restore the jewels to their hiding place, and Ruth saw his thin lips muttering savagely.

Ruth turned from him and saw the watery-eyed Waldo staring at his uncle, with jaw slack and an expression as if he had just seen a fairy tale enacted before him. The young man turned and began to move toward the door. Then Mrs. Farstone called to him and he turned and blinked at her.

"Waldo, are the refreshments ready to be served?" she asked briskly.

"Oh, yes, quite, Aunt Agnes," he answered.

"Then order them to be brought in at once." She cast a withering glance at John Farstone. "It will perhaps help us to remember that we are in a drawing room and not in the jungle!" She turned to move among her guests, and Waldo went softly out.

Farstone wrapped up his bronze, with a keen, fleeting glance around. For some reason, no one seemed inclined to approach him and he crossed to the door leading to his study and disappeared.

A few moments later, a butler entered from the servants' entrance, walked to the exit door and seemed to try it. Ruth, watching idly, noticed that the key, which she had seen, was no longer there when he turned away toward the long buffet set against the end wall.

She glanced curiously at Mrs. Farstone and saw their hostess was following the man with a puzzled frown.

"Is anything wrong?" Ruth asked her.

"It's not important—I suppose. I'll speak to Waldo when he comes in."

Ruth looked back at the butler, studying his face carefully; then her eyes narrowed. Farstone had warned her that his jungle sense had told him of strange things to hap-

pen this evening. And now, more than ever, she was suspicious of everything.

"Isn't he your regular man?" she asked Mrs. Farstone.

"No; but he's probably one of the caterer's men. Waldo will know. He made all the arrangements." She turned away—a little impatiently Ruth thought.

Ruth gave the man another glance—he was putting ice into the cocktails—then she drew a long cigarette case from her purse, and selecting a cigarette, held it in her fingers without lighting it.

She moved away from where she had been standing, and paused a moment to speak a word to one of the two young men who had accompanied her here with Hale.

He offered her a light but she declined, and strolled, apparently aimlessly, on toward the buffet.

Two serving men came in with trays and went to the buffet to load them with plates of canapés and other appetizers, a procedure which seemed to interest Ruth, for she stopped to watch them.

They started toward the guests, who were mostly grouped near Mrs. Farstone, passing Ruth. The butler, following to observe them, as a good butler should, stopped near her.

Abruptly, a tray fell to the polished floor with a startling clatter, instantly drawing the attention of practically every eye. Mrs. Farstone started forward in annoyance. She stopped suddenly, and a quite different expression came over her face.

The clumsy waiter was rising from his stooped-over position. He didn't have the tray in his hands. It was still on the floor. In its place, his right hand held a black automatic.

"This is a stick-up," a voice beside Ruth told them calmly, but with the authority of power.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE STICK-UP.

The startled guests turned toward the pseudo butler. An ugly-looking pistol had appeared in his hand.

"Be quiet!" he commanded in harder tone, against the little gasps and choked screams. "Do as you're told and no one's goin' to get hurt. We know the penalty, and if anyone acts up, that's his hard luck. Don't fool yourselves. We'll shoot, all right!"

So far as the guests were concerned, they seemed paralyzed with fright and incapable of anything. Ruth, with her quick mind, didn't know whether to be scared or amused. It seemed to her almost like a drama, rehearsed in advance.

She was thinking of Farstone's warning and the fact that he had been thwarted in his purpose to kill if attacked. And this had come almost too pat right on the heels of his frustrated attempt, although the act itself must have been planned ahead.

A sudden suspicion caused her to look furtively around. Her brother Miguel was no longer in the salon. She frowned hard against the thought that he himself could possibly have conspired this. She had seen little of her brother in the past few years, but she couldn't, and she wouldn't, believe this, although she could not be sure that others might not have that suspicion.

Her glance came back to the bandit leader. He looked real and formidable enough. She'd thought there was something suspicious about him when she'd first seen him. She looked away again and met the

*Max drove at his man with a football rush, driving him clear across the room and against the wall.*

glances of Max and Eric, and to both she narrowed her eyes and nodded slightly. Each nodded back in turn.

The erstwhile butler made a sweeping gesture with his gun.

"You men," he snarled to the guests, "get over to that wall and line up. Go on! Be quick about it!" Ruth saw his glance shoot to the entrance and back again.

"Oh!" Ruth gasped. "I believe I'm going to faint! Somebody catch me!" and she swayed nearer the leader of the trio of phony servants.

He swung around on her angrily. His eyes were blazing, his mouth opened to curse.

Ruth had raised her arms, like most in the room. Now they began to droop, and when her right hand came level with the man's face, her fingers pinched the butt of the cigarette they held, that was so like the new extra long cigarettes. But in place of the tobacco it was supposed to hold, a thin stream of liquid shot out and splashed on the man's brow and in his wide-open eyes.

His curse came forth as a scream of pain. The gun fell from his grip and clattered on the floor, while his

hands dug at his blinded eyes as he staggered around.

Ruth's two companions were no more idle than she. Apparently, they had taken advantage of the shifting, milling group of men as the two gunmen were herding them to the wall, and certainly they had acted on Ruth's signal.

Max, sturdily built, drove at his man with a football rush, putting a hard shoulder in the fellow's stomach, catching his gun hand and driving him clear across the room and against the wall.

Somewhere in their hurried passage, the pistol had been dropped, but unaware of that, Max lost no time in crashing rights and lefts to the unexposed jaw as the man doubled over from the blow to his middle.

The taller Eric, as lithe and quick as a cat, clamped a hand on his man's wrist and forced that arm up behind the thug's back until his pistol thudded to the floor. Then Eric lifted him bodily, twisted him in midair and smashed him down.

Minutes, perhaps, had passed in preparation, but the stick-up was over almost as quickly as it had begun. The blinded leader was still staggering helplessly around, and Ruth, knowing well the potency of the liquid, got away from him. The two gunmen, unarmed and with no more fight in them, were groping uncertainly to their feet.

The act, real or fake, was over; so Ruth thought in that moment of triumph. And now she had to discover which it was, to turn suspicion away from her brother Miguel if any should begin to talk wildly of him and his undisguised determination to take to himself the fortune John Farstone had shown.

Ruth stopped in her walk and looked around. Her eyes fell on the gun the leader had dropped. Possibly with the idea that, reinforced by it, she could make one of the three talk, she started toward it. Then she stopped dead in her tracks.

The servants' door had burst open with startling abruptness, and too late Ruth recalled the leader's quick glance in that direction, which should have told her he had a fourth partner there.

But, unlike the trio, this man was indistinguishable. Not only was his face masked, but he was also clothed from head to heels in rough overalls. Yet the two formidable guns he brandished were recognizable for what they were.

He glared around him, and Ruth wanted to laugh. She knew it was a pure fake, now. The first three had put on a pretty good act, but this amateur, bouncing out like the villain in an old Bowery melodrama, put the skids on the show.

"Don't anyone move!" he called hoarsely, and his voice had a strange, unnatural sound.

He looked over at his three companions and apparently decided they were unfit for further duty.

"We're going out," he declared in his peculiar tone. "I'll shoot anyone who interferes or tries to follow us for the next ten minutes! Come on, men!"

The blinded leader groped toward the sound of the voice; the two others followed more quickly. The masked man made a sweeping gesture to the room, then followed his henchmen through the doorway. There was the *click* of a lock

"The police!" Mrs. Farstone gasped from the chair into which she had collapsed. "Someone call the police. The phone is there"—and she waved a hand vaguely toward the wall.

"The line's dead; it must be cut," the man who got there first called back excitedly.

"I shouldn't worry," Ruth told them. "The whole thing was nothing but an act."

Mrs. Farstone came bolt upright in her chair.

"It was nothing of the sort!" she declared angrily, although from the way she had been clutching her diamonds a few moments earlier, it was evident she would have given much to think it was so. "It was an intended robbery, and I have a good idea who was behind it!"

"I wouldn't be too sure of it, Mrs. Farstone," Ruth told her, a little sharply.

"So you are thinking the same as I!" the lady cried exultingly.

"Suppose you wait a few moments," Ruth answered, and turned away.

She saw that Eric and Max were at the servants' door, trying keys in the lock, and she strode that way hurriedly. Unafraid, because she had been convinced the stick-up was nothing but a fake, she had studied the masked man with greatest care, figuring his height and his breadth of shoulders under the loose overalls.

That man had been quite tall, although he had stooped slightly in his absurd posture of bravado. Farstone was of good height; so, also, was her brother Miguel.

Ruth wanted to get through that door and get through it quick, and she was glad to see that Max had it unlocked and was peering cautiously through the slit of opening he had made.

"There's nothing to worry about," Ruth said, and shoved the door wide. She strode across a butler's pantry, and then she paused.

A man's form was stretched on the floor, motionless. Blood was trickling slowly down his temple from a cut close to the hair. His eyes were closed, but he was breathing.

It was Waldo, whom Ruth had forgotten completely, even to the fact that he had come out this way some time before. His evening clothes were hardly rumpled. Just the one blow on the head.

*Fake?* Ruth asked herself.

She stepped to his side, knelt and felt the wrist. Some small, hard object pressed her knee and she picked it up, looked at it curiously, then slipped it into her purse. She resumed her counting of Waldo's pulse, looking closely meanwhile at his face, where it was exposed as he lay on his side.

"Listen," young Eric spoke abruptly, and Ruth glanced over where he had a door slightly open into darkness beyond. "I hear something funny down there," he added in a whisper. "Come on, Max. Let's go see."

"Wait a moment," Ruth said, and scrambling to her feet, joined them at the door which led plainly to the basement.

She listened and heard a faint grating sound, then a soft scraping, as of a slippered or bare foot on the cement.

She smiled at her companions.

"Our lads would hardly have gone down here," she said in low tone, "but if one did, we want him, especially if he's in the act of taking off his overalls. I've got my hand on the light switch. Sneak down easy, and I'll snap it when you get to the bottom."

They tiptoed down softly and when Ruth judged they were at the last step, she pressed the switch.

Instantly, there was a yelp of surprise from one of them. Ruth was at the bottom of the stairs as the

echoes died away, and then she almost cried out in sheer horror.

A man's stout form lay on the cement. It was motionless, but it wasn't breathing. The bald head, with its fringe of hair, was half decapitated.

"Look!" Eric cried out, pointed.

Ruth's glance flashed that way.

Against one wall, several feet from the body, a strange figure was crouched down to the floor. Ruth saw first the shining of the eyes, glaring, steady, like those of an animal at bay. Then she made out the dark skin, the broad face at the cheekbones, and what seemed no forehead at all because of the shaggy mat of hair that covered it completely and fell below the ears.

They glared at each other, this strange creature and the three young people in their evening clothes: the jungle and fashionable civilization, and between them lay the body of a dead man, with the head half cut off.

"Farstone's head-hunter!" Ruth whispered in a voice she tried desperately to keep from trembling.

Slowly, as if the whispered sound had reached him and stirred him to movement, the man at the wall began to rise. And they saw the rough covering of his body and that his feet were bare. They saw the long, thin-bladed knife clutched in the dirty right paw.

"Steady!" Eric whispered, and although Ruth was watching the native, she was aware that Eric was moving to one side. The man shifted his eyes to Eric and back to them. He seemed making up his mind as to what he was going to do.

He was short and squat, but strength was evident in the long arms and broad shoulders. His tongue shot out, like a viper's, licking his lips in the single motion and Ruth, with a shudder, felt the eyes greedily taking in her long, bobbed hair.

"Don't move," she whispered softly to Max, "unless he comes this way, but don't let him get near you with that knife. Stare at him! Stare at him hard!"

Abruptly, the light in the basement was reduced by half and the squat man leaped six feet to one side, although they hadn't seen him poise for the spring. There he crouched, glaring at them, his eyes shifting from wherever Eric had gone and back to the two at the foot of the steps. His mouth began to work and saliva drooled from its corners.

"He's going to rush!" Max whispered, hardly above a breath. "When he starts—"

He had time to say no more.

With no more preparation than they had seen before, a single spring brought the man seemingly halfway to them. He landed, with legs bending slightly for the next leap, the long knife gleaming as he held it high.

Then some object streaked past Ruth's staring vision even as she felt Max's arm against her, pushing her backward and himself ahead. Something struck fairly between the native's wild eyes, with a loud *plop* and a little cloud of dust.

Whatever it was, its effect was instantaneous. There was a sharp, incoherent yell. The squat man whirled and went diving headlong to another part of the basement, disappeared through a doorway and slammed the door after him.

"Quick!" Max cried out. "If that's his den, let's keep him there!"

He leaped over the body on the floor and braced against the door, which had closed inwardly. Eric

*They glared at each other, this strange creature and the three young people in evening clothes. "Farstone's head-hunter!" Ruth whispered.*

joined him and, while Max held, brought up every object he could find to make a barricade. And they didn't leave until they were certain it could not be forced from the inside.

"Hope this is the only exit," Eric remarked, looking around. "At least,

it's the only door on this end and side. Got an idea what that place is, Ruth?"

He tried to make his tone nonchalant, but they were all conscious of that gruesome form on the floor, and they made their way around it as they returned to the stairs.

"That's Farstone's laboratory," Ruth answered, "and I'm inclined to believe Mrs. Farstone was right. She said something horrible was going on inside."

"Nice party you've brought us to," Max said jovially, as they came to the kitchen. "A stick-up, and now chased by a head-hunter. Anything more in the cards?"

"I'm afraid it's only started." Ruth amazed them by her answer, and her tone was sober. "You boys have been fine, sticking to me; but please don't let me down before this night is through."

"Don't worry," they both assured her, and Eric asked: "Any idea what this is all about?"

"I have so many ideas, they're driving me wild! I didn't look too carefully, but I suspect that dead man in the cellar is Mrs. Farstone's real butler. I don't think we ought to speak about it just yet."

"We ought to get the police in on this," Max suggested.

"Not just yet, please," Ruth begged.

"That head-hunter didn't kill him," Eric said. "Before I got the bright idea of the light bulb, I saw the rope that had probably strangled him. Somebody else hanged him, and it must have been the stick-up crowd."

"Yes, I saw that," Ruth said, "but I had almost forgotten it. Please wait for me in the butler's pantry —or, better still, go all the way in, if you can scare up a smile or a laugh between you to reassure that crowd."

Ruth waited, then stepped to Waldo's side, who apparently had not yet recovered consciousness. She again stooped over him, studying him closely. Rising, she went to the sink and filled a pitcher with cold water from the tap. She came back and, standing behind him, dashed the full contents over his face and neck. Waldo gasped, for his loose mouth had been partly opened. His eyes blinked.

"Don't kill me!" he shouted suddenly.

Ruth slipped silently into the pantry, closing the door, then went on into the salon.

## CHAPTER IV.

### WHO FELLED THE EXPLORER?

A few minutes earlier, Ruth had looked on all this as a fake. She shuddered now as the thought recurred to her. And if she had been worried at the beginning of the evening, she was nearly frantic now. For murder had been committed on an innocent victim, thus showing the temper of these men whom she had considered harmless.

She shivered again and wondered where was her brother Miguel, for he was not in the salon. And neither was John Farstone, the man she would hold responsible for what might take place there.

Ruth avoided Mrs. Farstone, and observing that the two young men were laughingly answering questions, made her way unnoticed to the far end of the salon and entered the corridor where she had earlier walked with Farstone.

She came to the door of the study and saw that a key was in the lock, on the outside. The sight gave her misgivings, and for some reason, she hesitated before knocking lightly.

There was no answer that she heard. She glanced both ways along the corridor, then opened the door a crack, listening. After a moment, she pushed it open slowly, peering around the edge.

Ruth thought, at first, there was no one there, and she stepped across the threshold, to stop suddenly. In the little space in front of the safe, and between it and the table with its chair, for the third time that evening she saw a form lying motionless. She hurried forward.

John Farstone was lying partly on his side, but with his face down and his back bent. And just to one side of the midway line between shoulder blades there protruded the hilt of a knife.

Strangely, perhaps, relief flooded Ruth, but it was instantly succeeded by overwhelming horror. *Could Miguel have done this?* she asked herself. And then, who else? Miguel had left the salon apparently before Farstone. Ruth had not watched to see which way he had gone, and now she considered it had been unnecessary.

She wanted to believe in him; she tried to tell herself that she still did, but she could not fight against all the factors that were lined up to point out his guilt. And, suddenly, anger flushed her face.

She bent closer, then knelt beside the stricken man. She had seen a slight lifting of his chest. He was not dead yet, as she had thought. She wondered, a little wildly, if he could talk—if he would talk and name his assassin.

One eye alone was visible as he lay there. The lid flickered and, bending over, she caught its look, hard and implacable. But his lips did not move.

"I will get help," she murmured, and rose to her feet, swaying a little as she hastened to the door.

In the corridor, she was surprised to see one of the two young men who had stood by her so well that evening.

"Oh, Max," she said. "Get Professor Hale quickly, will you? He's a doctor, and one is needed badly inside here."

He looked at her questioningly, but turned without a word back toward the salon, while Ruth returned to the study. She went toward the prone figure, but when she saw the single visible eye was closed, she turned from it and swung the partly open door of the safe wide, so that she could see into the compartment from which he had taken the bronze image with its priceless fortune.

It was no longer there, and Ruth could see no other place in the safe where it could be concealed. She could have no further doubt. The treasure was gone and there was only one who could logically have taken it: Miguel, her brother.

Ruth closed the safe door to the position in which she had found it and swung away, too much disturbed to notice the eye that glanced up at her, with its look of grim humor showing through the set expression of pain.

Professor Hale met her before she reached the door, and before he closed it behind him she caught a glimpse of Max, waiting outside. She nodded over her shoulder, then turned and watched the man of science and medicine, fearful of his verdict, yet chained to the spot to learn it.

Hale paused briefly to look at the protruding knife handle, then stooped to test the pulse. He came erect, turned again to study the position of the knife, but left it almost immediately to glance over the

nearby table and around the room.

"What are you looking for?" Ruth asked him.

"If that knife has a mate, the length of the blade would be of help to me."

Ruth stepped to the table, took one look and turned back. She nodded at the prone figure.

"If you can move him a little," she said, "try his belt on the right side."

Hale was on his knees instantly, and up in a moment. In his right hand was a creese with its wavy blade and its hilt a twin to the one now sunk in flesh. He bent low and put the two hilts close together, pressing lightly on the cloth of the coat to expose all that was to be seen of the embedded blade, then verifying the length of the one he held.

He straightened and tossed the extra creese to the table, much as John Farstone had done some time before. He walked with Ruth toward the door.

"It's touch and go," he said, "but on the whole, not hopeless. He's tough as the devil."

"You think he may live?" Ruth asked, and was surprised at the hardness of her own voice.

"It's a question how far and what the point has penetrated. I judge the blow was struck when he was bent over and the blade went downward instead of straight in. However, I don't dare withdraw it and determine the seriousness of the injury until I have something to work with."

"You don't want me to wait?" Ruth asked.

Hale glanced back over his shoulder.

"There is nothing you can do," he said, and they stepped into the corridor.

Ruth didn't see Max immediately before her, and she thought nothing about him as she stopped and turned in the opposite direction from that leading back to the salon.

"I don't suppose you know anything about this terrible business?" Hale asked her.

"There is another man in the basement—I think it is the butler," she answered quickly, "who was killed. I suppose the same persons could have attacked Mr. Farstone."

"Does Mrs. Farstone know about that? She was acting quite unconcerned just now."

"We thought it best not to tell about the butler until we found if anything else was wrong."

"Well, I'll probably have to tell her about her husband. I'll have to get some things from her, anyway. Where are you going, Ruth?"

"I want to get into the fresh air for a moment," Ruth faltered. "This has been a . . . a little too much for me, I guess. I can get out this way, can't I?"

"And I don't wonder. Yes; takes you right to one of the doors," and Hale strode hurriedly off.

## CHAPTER V.

### UNCOVERING THE GEMS.

There was no weakness in Ruth's nature, in spite of her pretense. On the contrary, the primitive strength that had never been far below the surface of her feelings was beginning to assert itself. She could not tell Professor Hale that she feared her own brother had committed this attack on the explorer, no matter what his provocation had been.

For one thing, while she could hardly doubt that it was true, she wanted confirmation from Miguel's own lips. And for another, that blow in the back was the stroke of

a coward, and according to her principles, such an act was worse than the attack itself.

Miguel had told her where he was stopping when he had phoned her earlier in the day, and she had heard him repeat the address in reply to Mrs. Farstone's apparently casual question.

Perhaps purposefully, Miguel had chosen a room not far from the Farstone residence, and Ruth knew she could reach it on foot within a few minutes.

Ruth had wondered about Mrs. Farstone's question. Knowing something of her husband's feelings toward his latest assistant, she could hardly be concerned over Miguel's comfort or welfare, and Ruth decided that probably Farstone himself had asked her to find out, for some reason of his own.

She put the question aside almost as soon as it came to her mind again. It seemed so trivial, in comparison with the other matters. She walked swiftly, and as it did not occur to her that anyone might be following her, she did not once look behind.

Coming to the street she was seeking, where the better residential quarter gave way to a more ordinary section, she found the number, mounted steps and rang the bell twice without answer. Then she descended to the basement entrance, and after a time the janitor opened that door.

Ruth explained to him that she was Miguel Portas' sister, that since he had only arrived that day, she'd had no earlier chance to see him.

"There was a telephone call," the man said, "and I think I heard him just go out."

"Then he'll be back soon. I'll go up and wait for him, if I may."

The man went with her to the first flight and indicated where Miguel's room would be, in the rear and one story higher.

Ruth found the door unlocked and the room lighted when she stepped in. Although this was a back room, it was unusually long, with windows on the outer side facing a narrow alley. There was no trunk in the place and only a single bag.

She went to it and rummaged through it without finding what she dreaded to find—the bronze image and its incredible fortune, proof of her brother's guilt.

Ruth wanted the bronze badly enough, and the jewels of whose existence they had never suspected. It was, as Miguel Portas had declared to Farstone, an heirloom of their family, cared for through the generations almost as a sacred symbol. But she would have forsworn both, if their loss would mean her brother's innocence of the cowardly assault from behind the victim's back. That was her code, and she had thought it was Miguel's, and she went on with her search hoping it still was.

The room itself held few places of concealment—bed, couch, chairs, and they took her but a minute. A doorway led to a short space, on one side of which was the bathroom, into which she gave a hurried glance, stooping low to see that the floor was clear.

She turned back to the closet on the other side of the passage, swept hanging clothes aside, peered into the shoe rack below, then raised herself on tiptoe to investigate the broad shelf above.

A coat had been thrown there carelessly. Her hand pushed under it, moved along. Her fingers encountered something, and of their own volition closed around a hard object, cloth wrapped.

Ruth didn't move. She stood

there, still on tiptoe, her whole body stiff while the blood drained from her face and surged through her heart in a spasm of pain and white-hot anger.

It was the final proof, shattering her last faith in the brother who had been like a parent to her in their years of orphanage. She tried to think, but her mind wouldn't work coherently. Her emotions had full control of her.

A sound from outside the room broke through her tortured confusion. It was in the house, close to the thin wall where she now stood. Footsteps! And for some reason, the sounds held her there motionless.

A sense of danger had come to her with those footsteps. It could be Miguel returning, she thought swiftly, but there was more than one person mounting the stairs.

And if it were Miguel, she didn't want him to enjoy the fruits of his crime, even if she would be denied what was rightfully hers. And it if weren't Miguel, it could be the police on his trail, seeking this final proof which even now was clenched in her grasp.

Then she heard a voice quite clearly—possibly because of a crack in the old wall. It wasn't the voice of Miguel. Another answered, in a coarse laugh, and that, too, was the voice of a stranger. *Detectives,* she thought.

Ruth's hand came from the shelf, holding the bronze and its treasure. For a moment she stood crouched in the little passage, glaring around as if her eyes could see what her mind sought: a way to escape. She whirled into the bathroom.

The window was up a scant foot. She tried to open it farther, but it was blocked from going higher. She craned her neck and made out the ironwork of a fire escape a little to one side, for the bathroom window evidently was not the intended exit to it.

There was time for but one thing. She shoved her hand, with the cloth-wrapped image, through the window opening, tossed the bronze lightly to where she hoped was the fire-escape landing, then closed and locked the window. A moment later, she was in the main room, with the passage door closed behind her.

She tried to forget the fortune she had intrusted to luck and the night. She tried to compose her features, to appear calm and unconcerned, as she heard the footsteps advancing along the corridor toward the door.

Blood was stronger than anything else; the blood of relationship. She was thinking only of how she could save her brother from the police.

Ruth reached into her purse, wishing vainly that she still had the trick cigarette she had used earlier that evening. But she'd had only one and the stick-up leader had taken all the liquid there had been in it. Instead, she drew out her compact and was touching her lips when the door was roughly opened.

These weren't the police, not the two burly forms that shoved through. As far from the law as the two poles are apart, were these lads.

"So!" the one in advance cried out. It was a snarling, triumphant cry. He was the leader of the stick-up crowd, and he seemed very, very happy at the sight of Ruth.

"So you're in this game, huh?" he growled. "Now, isn't that nice!"

The man behind him closed the door. He, too, had a wolfish grin. He'd been the one who had received young Max's special attention, as his face bore evidence.

"I don't know what you mean,"

Ruth said coldly. "This is my brother's room and I am waiting for him to return any moment. You'd better leave while you have the chance. The police are after you now," she added on an afterthought. Then her face blanched a little.

She had spoken before she realized the full meaning of her threat. These were the men who had already done murder. They must be the ones who had strangled the Farstone butler. Then another killing would mean nothing to them.

A second thought rushed through her mind. Were these the partners of Miguel in the murderous crime? The idea sickened her.

The leader took her words in slowly, as if he could not grasp them all at once.

"You are Portas' sister?" he repeated slowly. "Well, that makes a hell of a lot of things clear!" He turned to his companion. "See it, Jake?"

"All I see, Mose," Jake leered, "is the dame that busted up our little play back yonder, and makes all this run-around for the stuff when we oughta scrammed long ago."

"Yeah, I ain't forgot that," the leader growled. He stepped close to Ruth and suddenly cuffed her hard with his open palm.

Ruth came erect from the reeling effects of the blow, with blazing eyes. The tigress was aroused now, unafraid and wanting only to gouge and kill. And the leader must have seen this. He sprang at her. His rough hands grabbed her face between sweaty palms.

"Tear up some cloth quick, Jake," he snarled over his shoulder, "before she screams and wakes up the whole damn neighborhood!"

But it was Mose who made what outcry there was. Ruth's teeth sank into a finger that was pressed between her lips and Mose let out a startled, searing oath. His hands shifted to her throat, but Ruth's teeth found another finger before the rough, calloused palms made that attack effective.

Ruth was lithe and strong and tiger-quick. She writhed and squirmed. Her fingers dug at his eyes and tore at his hair. One leg twined around his and she tried to throw her body to break his hold.

The man's voice came forth in a steady stream of snarling oaths. Then, with all his strength, he clamped her throat. Her breath and her strength left her, and when the other man, Jake, rushed up with his cloth, her whole body was limp and her face almost purple.

She had no more power to resist as they forced a gag roughly into her mouth, nearly suffocating her as she gasped for spent breath. A strip held it firmly in place, and still another bound her wrists behind her. The leader shoved her roughly against the door to the short passage, and a hand on her shoulder held her there.

"Now talk, damn you," he snarled, "and be quick about it! Where is that stuff?"

Then the absurdity of his demand occurred to him. He pulled her away from the door and shoved her hard into a chair.

"Watch her, Jake, while I find it."

Hurriedly, he made the same search as Ruth had, but not with the same result. Ruth even heard him forcing the bathroom window high, which she hadn't been able to accomplish, at least in the time at her disposal. He came back into the room and his eyes were hard and ugly.

"You sure he didn't have it with

him, Jake, when he went out?" he asked his companion, with a cold quiet that impressed Ruth with more seriousness than all his blistering oaths.

"He couldn't have. Both his hands were empty. He went right by me and I could 'a' seen it or if his pockets bulged."

"Then there's only one answer." The leader's eyes centered on the girl in the chair, then swiveled around the sparsely furnished room and narrowed in thought. "How long d'you make it, Jake, since he went out and we come in?"

"Not more'n four or five minutes. I followed him, you know, till I picked you up, then we come straight here."

"Uh-huh. That's what I make it."

"What you thinking, Mose?"

"She got it outa the room, but she didn't have time to get it outa the house."

"Well, hell, we can't go lookin' all over the house!"

"We don't have to," the leader said softly. "She's going to tell us!"

Standing squarely before Ruth, with a swift motion of his hand he drew a long, straight-bladed knife from a shoulder scabbard. The hilt was straight, too, the blade wide and double-edged, coming to a fine, flat point.

He held it level with Ruth's throat and glared triumphantly into her eyes. And then a puzzled expression came into his own. For the dark eyes that stared back at him showed not the slightest fear. On the contrary, there was a light in them that mocked the man and his weapon.

"So that's all you think of it, huh?" he growled angrily, and pushed the point against the soft flesh.

Little beads of blood appeared and trickled down her throat. But she did not wince; neither did her eyes change their look.

The thug pulled his knife back a few inches.

"Take out the gag, Jake," he ordered. "We'll listen to her talk."

Ruth gasped a little when the ball of cloth was removed, and took her time getting her breath.

"One scream outa you," the man warned, "and I'll drive this all the way through! Now, what'd you do with it?"

"What are you talking about?" Ruth asked quietly, and made her look puzzled.

"So you think we are foolin' and you can stall, huh?" And again steel met flesh and the little beads of blood appeared.

Ruth shook her head, even while the point was against the skin so that it scratched a cut across her throat. Amazed, the man involuntarily drew his hand back.

"How can I answer your question," Ruth said coolly, "if you don't tell me what you are talking about?"

The stick-up man stared at her, then looked around at his partner and back at the girl.

"If I got the idea you're takin' our time—" he began.

"You're wasting all the time," she told him. "I have nothing to tell you, and you'll find that true even if you cut me to pieces. Go ahead, if that's what you're going to do anyway."

"All right. Just this once. I'm asking you what you did with the sparklers, the grit, the little knick that held the babies. Now, come on!"

Ruth frowned, then a bright look came into her eyes.

"You don't mean what Mr. Farstone had?" she asked incredulously.

"That's just what I do mean!"

"The last I saw of them," she said slowly, "he still had them. How did you know about them?"

He cuffed her with his free hand. "*We'll* ask the questions. You'll answer 'em. Now—"

"But I just told you."

The man's hand tensed. A growl started in his throat.

"Wait a minute, Mose," his partner intervened. "I got an idea." He grinned.

"So've I," Mose growled. "To shove his shiv through her damned lying throat!"

"No; look. Not just yet, anyway. You still good, Mose?"

"Huh?"

"Your always in pretty good practice, ain't you?"

Mose nodded. "I getcha."

"There ain't nothing like it to break 'em," Jake said gleefully.

## CHAPTER VI.

### TRIAL BY STEEL.

Ruth was yanked from the chair and pushed against the door, with her back to it, and her bound hands were tied to the knob.

Jake drew a knife of his own and remained beside her, while the leader strode to the far end of the room, balancing his weapon by the point of the blade. He turned and faced the girl, with a distance of about six paces between them.

"You better talk while you can," he advised grimly. "Maybe I ain't as good as I used to be."

Ruth did not answer. This, as Jake had said, was something different. To feel the pain of a cut and to stand it, is one thing; but to know a knife is flying toward you with force enough to drive through whatever it should hit, is enough to break any nerve. Still, she said nothing.

She wanted to think. There was something new in the situation, at least new to her understanding, and she wanted to get it clear. These men were not partners with Miguel; they had made that evident. Therefore, Miguel had had no part in the stick-up, had not planned it. And they knew that the bronze with its jewels had been taken from Farstone's hands, and had come to Miguel's room in quest of it.

How did they know that? But Ruth could only ask the question. She could not set her mind to work out the answer—not with the big leader beginning to sway a little to get his motion, with the keen blade between thumb and finger.

And her thoughts stood still as he swung backward, then forward, whipping his hand over. Ruth wanted to close her eyes, but she could not. And they saw the gleaming streak of light as it seemed to come straight toward her.

The passage was brief—a split second only—yet time stretched long for her in that instant. Then there was a thud against the wooden panel, a breath brushed her cheek, and she felt the quivering of the steel against it.

"That was too close!" the man Jake gasped. "I thought sure you'd spiked her!"

Mose was striding forward, grinning.

"Pretty good," he exulted, as he yanked the blade clear. "But it was a bit closer'n I figured. Shows how you can get outa practice. Well," he growled to Ruth, "you goin' to talk now, or you wanta make me try another?"

Ruth did not want him to try again. That instant of suspense had done something to her, had given her a terror she'd never known before. She was trying to cope with

*Ruth was pushed against the door, with her back to it, and her bound hands were tied to the knob.*

it, trying desperately not to give way to it. But fear suggested a compromise. Miguel was not there, and she could suggest that he must have taken the prize somewhere else.

"You could have been mistaken—" she began; and then there was the sound of a step in the corridor and she broke off.

The knife man tore the gag from his pocket where he had stuffed it, and again forced it into Ruth's mouth.

"Get to the door," he ordered his companion, in a hoarse whisper. "Switch is right beside it. Maybe it's the guy, and we gotta take him."

He finished binding the gag in place and was halfway to the door, when the room was suddenly darkened. The door opened and the light went on again.

It was Miguel Portas, and he was faced with a knife poised in its aim for his heart, while he felt the pressure of another point at his back. Jake kicked the door closed, and the movement caused his sharp blade to scratch the skin of Portas' neck.

"Hold him, Jake," the leader of the two ordered, and Jake obediently clamped a hold with his free hand on Miguel's neck in front, while he held the knife point where it could be felt behind.

The first man got more strips of the cloth and, twisting them into something like a rope, bound the Brazilian's arms behind his back. Then he turned and spun the key in the lock.

"I oughta croak him," he growled, "but I'm playing this safe, Jake, case the dame don't come through and we have to finish her."

At that, Miguel Portas raised his head sharply. So far, apparently, he had not seen his sister and had no suspicion that she was in the room. He glared around, and the sight that met his eyes almost proved his immediate undoing.

Ruth was standing against the door, and he could tell that she was bound and even more a prisoner than himself. Her dress exposed her throat, and on it he saw the crimson streaks where the knife had cut.

For the moment, it seemed that he would go berserk, but the two knives that instantly threatened him made him realize the futility of resistance against them. He suddenly became immobile.

And it was evident to the two thugs that he was more concerned over his sister than himself, for he ignored them completely and continued to stare at her. But for some reason beyond his understanding, she would not meet his look.

He waited, braced, unmoving, paying no attention to the leader's command. But Ruth's gaze was fixed straight ahead, and her lips pressed together over the rough gag showed that she had no wish to speak, even if she could.

Portas turned finally to his captors.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he asked quietly.

Mose stared at him, amazed, saying nothing.

"Tell him." Jake cut in, "and then let's get on with it. We can't fool around here all night. If he doesn't come through, heave another one at the dame. That'll bring him, if he has anything to spill."

"Perhaps I have," Miguel Portas said in the same cold tone, "and perhaps I haven't. It depends on what you want to know."

"We want to know," the leader said, with elaborate sarcasm, "what the hell you've done with the jewels you took off Farstone?"

"I took nothing from Farstone,"

Portas answered instantly; and for the first time, his sister's glance wavered in his direction.

Mose's face purpled with sudden anger.

"Say," he began, chokingly. He swung abruptly. Again his arm whipped over, and again the gleam of steel shot through the air. The blade grazed Ruth's other cheek, and so hard was it driven that it split the panel and the hilt jarred against the wood.

Portas started forward, but the point of Jake's knife met his chest. Mose pulled the knife free. He came back a stride and faced Portas, his face convulsed with rage.

"Talk," he ground out. "So help me, the next won't miss!"

"You let her out of here," Portas said, "and I'll tell you everything I know."

"Oh, yeah? Well, maybe you don't know enough. We figure you brought the image here and she put it somewhere before we come in."

"You're crazy!" Portas answered quickly. Almost too quickly, for it brought a leer from the man facing him. "How could she? I've been gone only a few minutes and she certainly wasn't here when I went out."

"Now we're gettin' somewhere," the leader snarled triumphantly, and Portas must have realized his mistake, for his glance flickered to Ruth, then around the room a little desperately. "You admit you brought it, and that's all I wanted to know, for you didn't take it out with you—"

"Yes?" Portas said, so quietly that the man stopped with his mouth opened. "And how do you know what I might have done with it before I went out?"

The stick-up man stared at him. He turned, glared long at Ruth, then looked at his companion and nodded. He walked deliberately to the far end of the room and took his position there, toying with the knife in his fingers.

"We'll work it this way, Jake. There ain't any dame ever lived could hold up against a shiv. Now, this one goes plumb center, right through her pretty throat—if he don't open up 'fore you count three. Count!"

"One!" Jake began, a little hoarsely.

Ruth started making frantic motions with her head, but apparently the only one that noticed this was the man about to throw his knife and he grinned as if aware she had broken.

"Two!"

Ruth no longer looked at the man balancing his knife. Her eyes sought her brother and grew frantic. She saw he was tensed, watching the thrower's motion. Regardless of what Jake might do, Miguel was about to cast himself in the knife's path at the last instant, when it could not be deflected in its aim.

"Thr—"

A hand rattled the knob of the door, a louder sound than Jake's hoarse count, stopping it before it was fully uttered.

"Open up! Police!" a voice rasped sharply.

The instant reaction of each person in that room was his own and unlike that of the rest. Jake streaked for a window, from which already he must have noted the fire escape.

Miguel Portas hesitated for a bare fraction of a second, and lost his chance for self-sacrifice; for the stick-up leader already had his arm in motion, and sudden rage at the interruption must have carried it on. The steel streaked true on its deadly aim.

But Ruth's glance had come back to him and in that instant she dropped like a plummet, and the blade pierced the wood just at the level where, a moment before, her heart had been.

With a yelp of anger, Mose rushed for it to finish his work of revenge, but Portas' body crashed into him, and the force of his rush slammed the man against Jake and the window which he had half raised.

There was the splintering tinkle of broken glass, a snarl of pain. Jake went through headlong. Miguel's hands were bound, but his feet were not and he kicked viciously at the small of the back exposed to his aim. Then, when the man half turned, Miguel's shoulder rammed him again and he fell on the sill.

A fist was pounding on the door, but for the moment no one heeded it. Ruth's fall had broken her wrists free of the cloth that had bound them. She had the knife now and, like a tigress, she was coming to Miguel's aid.

Consumed by rage, the bandit leader had scrambled upright, but in the act of springing on Miguel, he saw Ruth bearing down on him and dived headlong after his companion.

"Open up!" the voice at the door called again.

Miguel glanced sharply in that direction but, strangely perhaps, Ruth paid it no attention.

She slit Miguel's bonds with her knife, then stepped back a pace, facing him, her eyes fixed on his.

"You told them," she said tensely, "that you took nothing from John Farstone. Yet the bronze was here. I found it."

"He gave it to me," Miguel said simply.

"What!" she cried incredulously.

"He gave it to me," Miguel repeated.

"You mean . . . you mean you didn't take it from him by force—you didn't stab him?"

She saw the answer in his face, the sudden start, the look of surprise and disbelief.

"You say John Farstone was stabbed?" he demanded blankly.

"Wait a moment!" she cried.

She flew across the room, turned the key in the lock and pulled open the door.

"Come in, Eric," she called, and ran back to her brother.

But she didn't say anything at once. She was staring at him, her look as blank as his but her mind working overtime, trying to unravel the mystery which his revelation had suddenly given a situation that she had feared was all too clear.

Young Eric came a short way into the room, then stopped, watching the two curiously. Ruth had instantly recognized Eric's voice, and now had forgotten him.

She believed her brother, for she had seen the truth in his eyes and knew they could neither lie to her nor deceive her. And for the moment, relief swept her. But not for long. She knew he was innocent of the murderous attack on Farstone.

But what of the others back there; of Mrs. Farstone, who had suspected Miguel of a part in the holdup? Now she must have learned of her husband's desperate injury, and she would believe the same man guilty of that. And Hale?

It seemed an age had passed, but Ruth knew it could not have been many minutes since she had left that house, although they might have already gotten word to the police meanwhile.

"We must go back!" she said suddenly.

"Why?" Miguel asked.

"Tell me what happened," she said quickly.

"After Farstone showed the jewels," Miguel said. "I wandered into the corridor, although I had no idea where I was going. I must have been pacing up and down, for the first thing I knew, Farstone called to me from the door of his study. I went to him, and he thrust the wrapped bronze into my hands. 'I will have my joke, Portas,' he told me, 'but this is yours.'

"He turned, closed the door. I don't remember if he locked it. I wasn't interested in that. I hurried here as fast as I could, and was thinking where I could hide it safely until morning, when I got the telephone message to meet you immediately at the street corner below the Farstone house. When you weren't there, I came back."

He looked curiously at Ruth, and she said: "I tossed it out the window to the fire escape."

"Then those men must have found—"

"We can't think of that now," she broke in excitedly. "No matter how valuable it is, there is something more important first. We've got to hurry back, and you must be seen there, Miguel. Come on!" She turned toward the door.

"Wait a minute," he called. "Why? Our first duty is to ourselves, isn't it? Why should I go there?"

"Listen," she said swiftly. "There was a man killed, in the basement, in the holdup, and Mrs. Farstone thinks you had something to do with that attempt. There is a head-hunter we locked in the laboratory, and he may be loose by now. There is Farstone, probably dying, and Mrs. Farstone will blame you for that. Besides, the man who stabbed him is possibly in that house now. We must hurry, I tell you, Miguel!"

And this time she went to the door.

On the street, the moment they passed the narrow alley and a glance told Ruth it was clear both of the men and of any object below Miguel's window, she broke into a run, while the others matched her speed.

Young Eric pushed up alongside her.

"I wanted to tell you—" he began, but she cut him off nervously.

"Not now, please, Eric," she panted. "Later. I can't think of anything now except, I'm awfully grateful. I had no idea you'd followed me."

## CHAPTER VII.

### PROFESSOR HALE EXPLAINS.

Ruth led them to the side door, which she had used a few minutes earlier. She had slipped the catch automatically when she had come out, and oddly enough now found the door still unlatched.

They went in and to the corridor from which Farstone's study opened on one side and the salon, farther along, on the other.

At the moment of their entrance, all three were struck by something that seemed strange and out of place, and immediately realizing that it was the complete silence of the place, they proceeded with almost stealthy quiet and without speaking.

Ruth, who was in the lead, paused briefly at the study door and put an ear to the panel, although she did not try the knob. She'd had little time to think of Farstone's plight, but she vividly recalled now that she had left him with a knife in his back, possibly dying and with Hale

about to determine that fact.

Then, she had been entirely absorbed by fear of her brother's guilt; now, she knew differently, but she still had to impress that belief on others.

If Ruth expected to hear any sound in the study, she was disappointed. Almost at once, she turned away and hastened down the corridor, wondering with a feeling of dread what more had happened to throw the whole house in such silence.

The guests had been noisy enough when she had left them. Thanks to the calm poise of the two young men, Eric and Max, the gathering had been given no suspicion of the tragedy that had ushered in the stick-up and, with the departure of the bandits, had been inclined to treat the whole matter as a harmless, if exciting, episode while it lasted.

Ruth had closed the salon door behind her on a very gaily chattering group of men and women. She opened it now not only on silence, but also on a deserted room. The lights were still on, as she had left them. The buffet had not been cleared, and, although the food was somewhat depleted, it still held various delicacies of the caterer's art.

Glasses stood on small tables beside the chairs which some of the guests had occupied. Cigarette butts littered ash trays and their stale odor mingled with the fainter scent of perfume. But over all was that weird, depressing silence.

Ruth had paused on the threshold, and the others had stopped with her, while the eyes of all three surveyed the peculiarly desolate scene before them. Then a slight sound at one side of the long room caught Ruth's keen ears.

She glanced that way quickly and saw a man on his knees in the little, paneled niche which had inclosed the telephone. Ruth pointed a hand and strode that way, and the man, hearing their approach, got to his feet and turned to meet them.

It was Professor Hale, the man of science and medicine. Ruth saw his quick, searching glance at her brother Miguel before he looked at her, but she could make nothing of his expression. He shook his head.

"Can't seem to get it working," he said. "They probably cut out a section of wire in another place."

"Never mind that," Ruth said impatiently. "Tell us what has happened. What about Mr. Farstone?"

Hale gestured toward some chairs, seated himself, and selected a cigarette from a pack he found on a table beside him. His calm deliberation strained Ruth's jangled nerves, but she forced herself to remain quiet and await his pleasure, for she realized that he was apparently considering his reply.

"Farstone will live," he announced finally, with an almost furtive glance at Miguel Portas. "The knife, fortunately for him, went downward, as I said to you, and not directly in, which would have caused an immediate fatality. However, in its passage it glanced from a section vertebra, striking a nerve and causing instant paralysis.

"On removing it, with this exception, he was not seriously hurt, and if he remains absolutely quiet for a certain period, the danger of paralysis will probably be eliminated."

"Where is he now?"

"I put him to bed myself and left him there to sleep."

"What about the others?"

Hale shrugged before replying.

"It seemed best to get rid of the guests without their knowledge of

anything serious having occurred here. We did that, and then found that all the servants had gone as well." He hesitated a moment.

"Mrs. Farstone," he went on finally, "was insistent that the police be somehow notified. I was obliged to promise her that I would do so as soon as I had the phone in working order again." Hale regarded the smoke curling from his cigarette.

"In reality," he said, "I was not going to do it, even if I had the phone in order, which I haven't as yet, until you had been given a reasonable time to return. And I am very glad you are back now."

"Listen," Ruth said swiftly. "I know what Mrs. Farstone was thinking—or trying to make herself believe—which she probably communicated to you. Miguel had nothing whatever to do with the attack on Mr. Farstone.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Farstone had given him the bronze, as our property, and was perfectly all right when Miguel hurried away to put it in a safe place. The attack on Mr. Farstone came after Miguel had gone."

Hale looked at her keenly, and Ruth noted that relief brightened his face.

"No offense, Portas," he said, with a glance at Miguel. "The lady was very convincing, as well as angry, and you certainly had all the provocation a man could have, to see his own property dangled before his eyes in that fashion which Farstone knows peculiarly how to do.

"Frankly, his method of taunting you to an attack, which was most obvious to me, made me speculate a little on a couple of other matters of the fairly recent past."

"I'll tell you something," Portas said unexpectedly. "When I left my South American home, I had merely heard that the bronze was missing from its usual place. I didn't know that Farstone was the one who had stolen it. But I had learned something, from the natives, which made me suspicious of the fates of Mansfield and Hastings, my predecessors in Farstone's employ.

"I came here immediately to look into that. However, when I saw our bronze and the fortune in jewels it contained, I forgot my first errand for the time being."

Hale nodded.

"Well, I am truly glad your temper didn't get beyond your control." He turned suddenly toward Ruth. "But someone," he said slowly, "drove a knife into Farstone's back."

"Eric, here," she said, "has just saved us from an encounter with two of those stick-up men, both of whom had knives. Either of those men could, and probably would, have done it if they'd had the chance. They didn't. At the time of the attack, one was blinded and his vision couldn't have cleared for fifteen minutes. I know the effects of that liquid.

"The other was reeling from the punishment Max had given him. There was a third, but I think Eric had put him out of commission. There was the fourth, uninjured, but he could have gone with the others. Where is Mrs. Farstone?" she asked abruptly.

"She left the salon just a few moments ago. I was busy with the telephone wires," Hale explained, "and I didn't see which way she went."

"And the helpful Waldo?"

Hale laughed.

"Waldo is quite a hero, and he was wearing his laurels with becoming modesty: a bandage around his wounded head and the look of a martyr in his watery eyes! Between

us four now, I think Waldo too dumb to have been as frightened as most men would have been."

"Do you know," Ruth asked again, "what Mrs. Farstone went for?"

"She said something to Waldo, to which I paid little attention at the time. Let me see. Yes, it went something like this—that Farstone would be laid up for some time and this was the opportunity she had been waiting for, since he could not stop her. And she asked Waldo if he would go with her.

"I am sure of that, for he didn't reply at once, and I looked around at him and saw him looking at her with his mouth half open, as if he couldn't quite get what she was talking about. Finally he agreed, I guess, for they went out together."

Ruth turned and stared at the young man, Eric. "Where is Max?"

Eric smiled.

"That's what I have been trying to tell you all this time. He went—"

He broke off, and even if he had talked on, no one there would have taken in his words.

A scream, distant, a little muffled by intervening doors, pierced the silence of the great house beyond the room where the four had gathered. It was a woman's scream, and faint as it was, the sheer terror that rang through it gripped the startled listeners and held them momentarily where they were.

Once again it shrilled, and instantly another cry rose above it, a weird, prolonged, unearthly cry that was more wild than human. Miguel Portas sprang to his feet.

"Good God!" burst involuntarily from his lips. "It is the head-hunter's cry in pursuit!"

Ruth and young Eric were already running toward the servants' entrance to the salon. Hale started uncertainly after them, but Miguel Portas, fleet of foot, seeing where they were going, passed them and wrenched the door open before they could reach it.

Ruth caught up with him, however, in the kitchen, where he had paused to look uncertainly around.

"Wait, Miguel," she cried. "We know the way and you don't!"

She unlocked and opened the door to the basement, but Eric pushed past her and went down the stairway first as Ruth pressed the light switch. The scream rang out again, but, strangely, it sounded more muffled than before. Still, the terror in its tone was no less.

The four came to the basement floor where still lay the body of the murdered butler. Ruth and Eric avoided it, but sight of the half-decapitated head drew a sharp exclamation from Hale, who had caught up with them.

"What is this infernal thing?" he demanded, while Eric, with Ruth helping, was attacking the barricade which they had hastily erected.

"All I know," Miguel Portas answered, "is that it certainly was the cry of one of the head-hunting tribes of the Upper Amazon. I have heard it only once before, but I could never forget it."

"John Farstone brought one of them back with him," Ruth flung over her shoulder. "We ran into him here. He was starting to attack us, when Eric frightened him. He is in the laboratory behind this door, which we blocked so he couldn't get at us again."

She straightened suddenly and stepped back.

"Wait!" she said. "He is in there, but Mrs. Farstone couldn't have come this way. We're crazy! There must be another entrance. Come on! We've got to find it!"

"Hold on a minute!" Eric called, frantically tearing at the barricade litter. "Something is going on in there! I can hear it. It's a fight of some sort. And this is the quickest way in!"

"How is the savage armed?" Hale asked.

"With a hell of a big knife," Eric told him.

"And what weapon have you to meet him with?"

There came a splintering crack of wood and Eric brandished a barrel stave in his hand.

"I've got a club now," he said, and went to his work again.

"No!" Ruth cried. "We must go back and around the other way, if we can find it. Mrs. Farstone was not in there when she screamed last. It sounded farther away."

"Listen!" Eric called to them, and placed his ear close to the door he had partly uncovered.

They stood in their tracks, and for a few moments there was no sound in the basement. Then Eric breathed something they could not hear and looked slowly around at them. His gaze settled on Portas.

"Take this club, will you?" he said, tossing him the barrel stave. "I'm going in here. Ruth, you better beat it," he added, and started on the door again.

"I'm going back, anyway," Ruth cried, and ran toward the stairs.

She stopped with foot half raised, arrested a second time by the wild, inhuman cry. But this time it was near at hand, seemingly just the other side of the door which young Eric was struggling desperately to free. And in its dying echoes they heard again the woman's faint scream.

"I'm going!" Ruth cried, and ran up the stairs.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### HEAD-HUNTER'S CHASE.

In the kitchen, Ruth heard a step behind her and a glance over her shoulder showed Hale close behind. They burst into the deserted salon together and raced for the farther end.

"Do you know the layout of the house?" Ruth threw at him, as they passed side by side. "Do you know the other way down?"

"No, but it might be through Farstone's study. Go there," the stout man of science panted. "Farstone's weapons!"

They passed through the far doorway and tore along the corridor and into the explorer's study. Hale at once looked for a weapon among the many trophies, while Ruth made her way to the wall opposite the safe and examined it for any sign of a door which, earlier, she had not observed.

She found it at last, close to the outer corner of the room and cleverly concealed by the paneling. She found the latch, too, which could have passed for a native scabbard, although it held no knife now and gave, with a little *click* as she pulled down on it.

She opened the door on a landing. There was another door from the landing, to her right, but she failed to notice it because her gaze was fixed on the stairway leading downward.

Hale came to her as she paused on the threshold. In his hand was a long, curved cutting knife, not unlike the bolo of the Filipinos but not as heavy as the Cuban machete.

"Listen!" Ruth whispered to him. "Mrs. Farstone must have come up this way, I think, but if she had come through this door, we must have heard her from the salon. I don't

hear a thing. Do you?"

Then, almost as if in answer to her question, from below came a single rasping thud. That was followed by silence. Ruth turned toward Hale and saw that he was listening intently, not with his head bent downward like herself, but with his right ear raised a little.

"Get back!" Hale told her, and she slipped away to one side, while, leaving the door slightly ajar, he took his position beside it with his weapon raised high.

Ruth looked around hastily in search of a suitable weapon for herself. She did not see one, but she did observe that the safe door was still a little open, as it was when she had earlier left the room.

From some room or corridor not far distant, and on that same floor, there came once more a woman's terrified shriek. It was followed by the sound of running feet, the slam of a door, the pounding feet and again the unearthly scream.

Hale, too, must have missed the other door on the landing, for he swung back into the room uncertainly. And the sounds continued uninterruptedly.

"He's chasing her round and round!" Hale cried.

"But where? We've got to get to her!" Ruth started toward the door to the corridor, but Hale called to her to wait, to let him go first.

He pushed past her and both stared down the corridor, but saw only the door which led back into the salon, and then both heard distinctly running steps in that room, following the heavy slam of some door.

They sprang that way, with Hale reaching the door first and thrusting it open. Ruth pushed in shoulder to shoulder with him.

Far down the long room, a woman was running stumblingly, as if near exhaustion but making speed as was shown by her blond hair trailing behind her head.

"Mrs. Farstone!" Hale called, when he was almost at the servants' door. "Stop! We're here to help!"

Mrs. Farstone slowed down as she neared the door. She turned her head toward them and they could see the wild look of insane fright in her staring eyes, while her opened mouth gasped for breath.

Both Ruth and Hale had started toward her, but they had taken barely two strides when a door halfway down the long room burst inward and the horrifying figure of the squat native sprang in.

The long, gleaming knife Ruth had seen once before was in his hand. Hale cried out and for an instant the black eyes, like those of a jungle animal, were turned in their direction. But at the same time, unfortunately, an involuntary scream burst from Mrs. Farstone and the savage whirled in that direction just as the woman was disappearing through the doorway.

Hale cried out again. Then he threw his weapon with all his force at the retreating form, but it only clattered harmlessly along the floor, and while he and Ruth were running after it, the native was drawing nearer the door.

They had gone barely halfway down the room when he came to the door and darted through it out of their sight.

"Hold it!" a rough voice suddenly snarled, from their right.

Amazed, they looked quickly in that direction. Unnoticed by either, a man had come into the room. It was the stick-up leader, and he was striding toward them. There was the gleam of a knife in his right

hand. A second man slipped through the opened door behind him and ran to his side—the man called Jake.

Both Hale and Ruth had stopped involuntarily at the command. Now Ruth started forward again.

"We can't stop!" she cried. "You saw that beast. He will murder Mrs. Farstone!"

"Stop!" the man yelled, and raised his arm slightly.

"I won't!" the girl cried back at him, and tensed herself to run.

"All right," he snarled. "This time you get it!"

He swayed once, with his arm drawing back and rising for the throw. The knife left his hand, but not as was intended. It fell from lifeless fingers, and the sound it might have made as it struck the floor was lost in the crashing report of a pistol.

Ruth paused and looked at young Max coming through the doorway, his pistol now leveled on the man Jake. She noticed something strange about Max, but took no time to see what it was. She was aware of Miguel and of young Eric calling something from behind her, but she had no thought for that.

"Hurry!" she cried to Hale, and she was running again.

He swept up his weapon as he followed her and, with strenuous effort, caught up with her before she reached the basement stairs. His hand grasped her shoulder as she was about to descend, and he forced himself ahead. Yet she followed closely behind him.

There was silence in the basement, now; not a whisper of sound. A weird, dread silence as they stepped cautiously toward the doorway Eric had barricaded, and which now stood open before them. Hale still preceded her, his weapon ready, but she was close to his shoulder and almost as soon as he, she saw the prone figure on the floor.

It was motionless and, as they crept nearer, they saw it was lifeless and the body of Waldo, the simple-minded nephew.

"Steady!" Hale cautioned her.

Ruth glanced beyond Waldo's body to another one; and that, also, was not moving. It lay face downward, the matted hair showing no neck at all, and just beyond one outflung hand was the gleaming knife. It was the head-hunter. Ruth could not understand but she moved forward after Hale, trying not to look too closely at the crimson gash across Waldo's throat, stepping around the native.

Then she saw the woman's body and noticed, with a curious sensation, that the string of shriveled heads she had seen in Farstone's study was close beside her shoulder.

Hale, who had knelt beside the woman's body—it was Mrs. Farstone —straightened.

"Fainted," he said tersely. "And mercifully!" He glanced beyond her. "Well, I'm damned!" he exploded, and strode forward.

Ruth hurried after him. Another form was lying just beyond the threshold. It, too, had an outstretched arm and a pistol was grasped loosely in the hand. But the eyes, while very bright, were grim and tensed with pain.

"I guess I'm done for this time, Hale," John Farstone was saying. "I can't move at all. At least, I can't raise myself."

"I warned you if you moved it would be so," Hale said shortly.

The explorer shrugged, and his glance went back into the laboratory where his wife was lying unconscious.

"Let me talk," Ruth said, a little later.

The rest were gathered in the explorer's bedroom, where he lay without motion, with the exception of his restlessly shifting eyes.

"I am going to tell the truth of this," Ruth spoke again. "I know who planned the robbery, and who struck Mr. Farstone from behind. The jewels are no longer in the bronze. They weren't there when he gave it to Miguel.

"Max, here, saw me toss the bronze from Miguel's window and brought it here after he had waited a long while for Eric to come to him, as agreed. I opened it just now—as you, Mr. Farstone, had done before us. Now—"

"I prefer you wouldn't say it," the explorer broke in.

"I am telling it," Ruth insisted.

She opened the purse, which she had managed to keep with her, and from it took a small object which she held concealed in her hand.

"Here is one proof," she said, then opened her palm and showed a small, round pebble. "That was used," she explained, "to disguise the voice of the masked man who rescued the stick-up men the first time. I found it beside Waldo as he pretended to be unconscious in the kitchen.

"I examined his wound carefully, then. It was probably self-inflicted and would not have rendered a kitten unconscious. But while looking at it I also saw the mark left by the elastic of his mask. Moreover, the man called Jake, who is now Max's prisoner out there, will confirm this."

She paused, but no one spoke, no one contradicted what she had said.

"Waldo must have planned the stick-up for the diamonds Mrs. Farstone and the other ladies were wearing, for a split afterward. Then he saw something bigger—a prize he had not dreamed of and of which his companions in the robbery part were unaware.

"Miguel left Mr. Farstone just before the holdup. Farstone was stabbed just when the stick-up started, and the only one who could possibly have done that was—"

"Just a moment," John Farstone broke in. "Waldo is dead, killed by the savage undoubtedly while defending my wife. There is no question of justice to be gained by going into this further."

"How about Mansfield and Hastings?" Miguel Portas asked coldly. "If I am not mistaken, and I do not think I am, one of their heads is on that string you were so proud of, and the other will be. The other three are natives. I suppose mine was to be the sixth, but I'll let that pass now."

"Listen, Portas," the explorer said, with something of his old fire. "I have told my story and I defy you or anyone else to disprove it! If those are the heads you say they are, prove that, too. But it will not alter my story one whit.

"Now, I have something to propose. I say, let us go no further in this matter of my nephew. No law can punish him now, if what your sister was about to say should be true."

He paused, and it was evident that even the effort of speaking was difficult as well as painful.

"Hale," he went on, "tells me I will never walk again, and"—with a wry grimace—"I have never known Hale to lie. I have all the money for my needs. The jewels are in the lower compartment in the safe. Fill the bronze with them, you two, and go home. Leave me now. This has all been a little trying!"

THE END.

# THE HUNTER FROM BEYOND

## by Jack Storm

***Modern murder and 1,000-year-old tomahawks give Corporal Calhoun a problem that nearly had him believing in ghosts!***

Corporal Steve Calhoun, of the State police, dodged from the protection of one tree to another. Gradually he was approaching an old, weather-beaten shack deep in this forest of upper New York State.

His service pistol was in his hand, because Corporal Calhoun was stalking big game—a bank robber and murderer who had disappeared three years before, and yet was known to be hiding out in this neck of the woods somewhere.

The shack itself presented a bedraggled appearance, and if anyone lived in it, that person took particular care not to give away the fact. Calhoun had searched fifty places like this in the past three years and used the same technique with all of them, because if killer Mike Malloy was hiding, he'd greet any man in uniform with hot lead.

Calhoun finally edged his way to the door, gave it a shove and turned the ray of his flash into the single room. He sighed deeply and chalked off another vain attempt. The shack was empty, and had been for maybe ten years.

It was dusk when he turned back to where his car was parked, a mile away. Calhoun trudged through the hazy light, still determined that his hunt for Mike Malloy would never cease.

He entered a small clearing, took about a dozen steps, and then a gun blasted the silence. A bullet whistled close enough to Calhoun's head so that he could plainly hear its angry *zing*. He hurled himself forward and down, sliding across the ground on his belly.

He grabbed for his gun, twisted around and fired back in the direction of the shot. Another came and the grass near his head seemed to spout a tiny geyser of earth.

This time, Calhoun saw the flash of the killer's gun and fired twice. He heard a yelp, the crashing of a man as he ran through the brush, and then silence again.

Calhoun arose and started in pursuit. He didn't dare use his flash, for fear that he'd make a target of himself. He spent twenty minutes in a vain search for a trail, but the darkness impeded him and he finally gave up.

Half an hour later, he reached the winding, rutted dirt road where his car was parked. Calhoun's uniform was smeared with dirt and torn in several places. His face was grim, but there was some satisfaction in his heart.

The man who shot at him must have been Mike Malloy. Who else would have wanted to murder a cop? Malloy was perfectly capable of it, knowing that his capture meant a swift journey to the electric chair.

Calhoun saw his coupé and quietly moved off the road into the protection of the forest growth. If Malloy had spotted the car, he might be lying in wait.

Nothing happened, nothing stirred. Calhoun moved a little closer, and then suddenly ducked down behind a bush. Someone was coming down the road—someone who stumbled along in a big hurry.

Calhoun saw the man a moment later. He was barely distinguishable. He passed close by the spot where Calhoun was hidden, and the trooper rose up suddenly and hurled himself upon the man. He wrapped a strong arm around his neck, drove a knee into the small of his back, and shoved the muzzle of his gun against the man's head.

"I'm going to let go," Calhoun said. "One move, and I'll blow your brains out!"

He released the man, spun him around and backed him toward the car. Calhoun turned his flash on, then.

His prisoner was a tall, slender man with a stubble of beard. He

was dressed in a khaki suit, like those worn by hunters. His both hands were busy clutching something tightly against his bosom.

"All right," Calhoun snapped. "What are you trying to hide? Come on—let's see what it is!"

The man gulped, tried to talk, but his voice was still paralyzed. He slowly extended both hands, and in them he gripped a—human skull! A skull that seemed to gibber at Calhoun and eye sockets that seemed to burn in silent rage.

Calhoun nearly dropped his flash. "What the devil—" he began.

The man found his voice. "I . . . I ain't done nothing. Honest, mister! I'm just Sully. I live in the woods, hunting and trapping. I . . . I ain't done nothing."

"Where'd you get this skull?" Calhoun demanded.

"I . . . I found it in a cave. It's an Indian skull. There were lots of them in the cave. Professor Joyce pays me good money for things like this. You know—arrowheads, bones and stuff like that. He studies Indians—dead ones, I mean."

Calhoun searched Sully, found no weapon of any kind, and relaxed his vigilance. Certainly this man wasn't Malloy, but he was just stupid enough to be Malloy's stooge. Yet his story about finding the Indian skull was believable. These parts were once the hunting grounds of Indian tribes and there were relics all around the section.

"We'll both go to see Professor Joyce," Calhoun said, "just to make sure you're telling a straight story. By the way—who was doing that shooting a few minutes ago?"

"Shooting? I ain't heard no shooting," Sully insisted.

"All right. Get in the car, you and your skull. I— Listen! Did you hear anything?"

"Yes! Somebody in the brush!" Sully was plainly scared. "Get me out of here! I know who it is. A ghost—an Indian ghost! They always go after them who steal stuff from their burying grounds. Get me out of here!"

But Calhoun didn't believe in ghosts; not the kind that made so much noise, anyhow. He had his gun in one hand, flash in the other, and he waited for more of that rustling sound to give away the location of whoever spied on him. The sound came again, and the beam of his flash danced through the gloom.

For one bare instant, it centered on a weird figure—a man dressed in buckskins, with a fur cap on his head. Through a leather belt around his middle was stuck a small hatchet, something like a tomahawk.

The man's eyes reflected the light and shone in terror. He gave a wild yell and disappeared.

Calhoun pumped two slugs in the direction the man had taken, but knew he had missed. He searched for a few moments, but gave it up. The forest and the darkness could protect a small army of men.

Sully was shaking as though the temperature had suddenly dropped to twenty below. Yet, although he must have been terrorized by the skull he held, Sully seemed to clutch it even harder. His hands were very dirty and made streaks on the smooth bone. His nails tried to grind into the hard surface.

"Wh-who was it?" he quavered. "Get me out of here! Hurry up! Them ghosts only walk by night. They'll get us, if we don't go away!"

Calhoun wasn't feeling any too secure himself. That eerie figure had been dressed like an Indian, and

*For one bare instant, the light centered on a weird figure—a man dressed in buckskins, with a fur cap on his head.*

had disappeared with all the stealth and cunning of a red man. Yet no one knew any better than Calhoun that the only Indians within two hundred miles were on a small reservation far from this point.

He started the motor and pulled away. When he reached the smoother, macadam road, he glanced at Sully.

"So you found an Indian burying ground. Where?"

"I ain't saying." Sully gave Calhoun a sharp glance. "Professor Joyce pays good money for things like that. He'll pay me to tell him where the cave is. Nobody knows but me. He'll pay, all right."

"Anybody living in the woods, besides yourself?" Calhoun asked.

"Nope; ain't seen nobody. You can let me off here. Professor Joyce just lives a piece down the next road."

But Calhoun didn't let Sully off. Instead, he drove straight to Professor Joyce's house, after Sully pointed it out. Sully ran up on the porch, clutching his skull tightly.

Calhoun reached the steps just as Professor Joyce turned on the porch light and opened the door.

Joyce was about forty-five, polished, and had the academic look of a man who spent too much time on his studies. He peered from behind shell-rimmed glasses.

Joyce looked at Calhoun and gave a start at the sight of his uniform, but that was nothing compared to the shout he emitted when Sully silently stretched out both hands offering the skull as though it were on a silver platter.

"A Mogollon skull!" he half shrieked. "Sully, where did you find it? Tell me. I'll pay you."

"Pay me first," Sully said doggedly.

"Yes—go inside. Officer, I suppose you realized the value of this skull and came along as a guard?"

"No. That skull means nothing to me," Calhoun admitted. "Not unless the man whose brain it once contained was murdered."

Joyce laughed, and actually caressed the skull. "He probably was murdered, but you wouldn't be apt to find the killer. You see—this man died more than a thousand years ago. I'm sure it is a Mogollon because of the shape.

They were warriors who preceded the American Indian and finally merged with him. They lived in caves, and buried their dead beneath the ground of the cave where they lived."

"Sully said he found that in a cave," Calhoun offered. "But, professor, I'm more interested in material things—like men who take pot shots at me. Somebody tried to gun me out a little while ago. I think it was a man named Malloy, a bank robber who killed two men during his last job, and got away. We're sure he is hiding in these parts somewhere."

Joyce kept looking at the skull, turning it over and over. "I hope you find him," he said. "I think I remember the case. I— Look here! I'm positive this is the rarest find in a century! See the shape of the forehead?"

"Looks like any ordinary forehead to me. Professor, you've been living up here during the summer months for four or five years, now. You're practically isolated and Malloy might have tried to snitch food from your house now and then. Have you ever missed any?"

"No, never. But as I understood the case, Malloy was fairly well fixed for money. Didn't he steal almost a hundred thousand dollars?"

"He did," Calhoun admitted, "and that's what makes me so sure he's never left the State. You see, part of that money consisted of bills in a series. Their numbers were known.

"Ever since the job was pulled, a few of those bills turn up every now and then—at busy stores, gas stations and the like. Malloy has been afraid to make a run for it. He must be living in the woods somewhere, and I'm going to find him."

"Good luck," Joyce smiled. "Forgive me if I seem to be more interested in this skull. Imagine! It probably rested on the floor of a cave for many hundreds of years, until Sully stumbled upon it."

Calhoun frowned. "A cave? Say —I never thought of that before. Malloy may have found one of those caves and made it his home. Look, professor, Sully knows where the cave is. We'll make him talk, and both of us will go up there. If Malloy isn't around, I'll help you search the place for . . . for skulls and bones."

## CHAPTER II.

### ATTACK IN THE DARK.

Sully, jammed in the coupé between Calhoun and Joyce, didn't like the idea at all.

"It ain't safe to go into that cave," he argued. "I heard funny noises when I was there, so I just grabbed this skull and beat it. You ain't getting me to go in. Drop me off near my shack, that's all I want."

Joyce leaned forward to look closely at Sully's face. "The cave is marked by a bare spruce standing just below a hillock. Is that right?"

"Just past the white birch grove," Sully said. "Right behind the spruce is big rocks. You can squeeze through 'em, all right. I was hunting. My dog disappeared, and pretty soon he came out of the cave with a bone in his mouth and galloped like crazy for home. Maybe he saw a ghost."

Calhoun braked the car and Sully got out in a big hurry. He walked up a very dark, narrow path toward his shack hidden in the forest. Calhoun pulled away and headed for the spot which Sully had described.

They found it easily, using the spotlight on Calhoun's car. The big spruce, without a needle on any of its stark branches, marked the location of the hillock.

With Joyce plodding beside him, Calhoun hurried through the brush. At the foot of the spruce, Calhoun halted and felt in his hip pocket.

"My searchlight must have fallen out. It's on the seat of my car. We'll need it, so I'll go back—"

"And leave me here alone, with Malloy somewhere around?" Joyce shook his head. "*I'll* go. I know the way back perfectly. You watch those rocks in case that killer friend of yours comes out."

Joyce disappeared in the darkness, and Calhoun drew his gun before he advanced toward the big rocks that framed a barely discernable entrance to the cave. Calhoun listened a moment, heard nothing, and then picked up a fallen branch from the spruce. Joyce would be gone for some time, and Calhoun decided not to wait.

He scooped a hole in the ground, built a small fire and stuck the dry piece of spruce branch into it. This flamed up quickly and became a suitable torch.

He had to enter the cave sideways, holding the torch high. Behind the rocks was a narrow passageway that extended a distance of about fifty feet and then ended abruptly into a huge subterranean cave. The cavern was almost thirty feet high, completely cleared of any loose rocks and had a hard, smooth floor.

In the flickering light of his torch, Calhoun saw things that made him shiver. There was a skeleton propped against one wall. It had no head, but it sat there as stately as a king on a throne. Not far away were other bones, almost turned to dust.

A spear, made of some extremely hard wood and still sharp-edged, lay beside one skeleton. A piece of a wooden comb, some sections of animal skin, and what seemed to be a blanket lay at the feet of another skeleton.

Calhoun had been in eerie places before, but this one surpassed all the rest by far. Forcing his nerves back to something like their normal state, he concentrated on a search for evidence of more modern cave dwellers—like Malloy. Calhoun wanted to see tin cans, old newspapers, cigarette butts.

There were none, but he doubted that even a man of Malloy's cold-

blooded instincts could have lived for three years with a bunch of skeletons. Perhaps there was another entrance; another cave.

Calhoun held his torch as high as possible and slowly pivoted as his eyes studied each section of the rounded limits of the cave. He saw two narrow openings and hurried toward one of them. It was impossible to squirm through. A ten-year-old boy couldn't have done it. Calhoun went to the second opening. This one was larger.

By taking a deep breath, he found that he could worry his way along the passage. It was tough going and his torch was ready to flicker out. The buttons on his uniform made scraping noises as they passed along the rock wall.

Then he felt a breath of fresh, cool air. A moment later, he reached a smaller cave and started to wriggle through the opening. He thrust his torch ahead of him so that it cleared the passageway. Then something that felt like a blanket, swept down, covering the torch and snuffing it out.

Calhoun's gun was in its holster. His other arm was rigid by his side, and there wasn't room enough to move it and get the gun free.

There was something in that other cave. It made no sound, but that blanketlike affair still hung on his arm. Everything was in pitch darkness now.

Calhoun estimated his chances of squirming into the smaller cave, and gave up the idea. If Malloy were there, waiting for him to enter, the killer would act at once. Calhoun's only chance lay in a retreat to the larger cave. He started to side-step back.

Twice he stopped suddenly and listened. No sound reached his ears. If the occupant of that other cave was following, he made no more noise than a ghost. Calhoun was sweating profusely and not all of it came from exertion. He didn't blame Sully for not wanting to come back to this tomb.

Then Calhoun reached the larger cave again and breathed a long sigh of relief. Now, all he had to do was find the exit, reach the forest again and wait for Joyce. The professor should be almost back by now.

Calhoun couldn't find the exit, so he reached into his pocket for a match. There was danger in striking it, for whoever, or whatever, had put out that torch may have followed him to the main cave. Yet it was almost as dangerous simply to stand there in the darkness and wait for help he wasn't at all sure would ever come. Joyce might have been waylaid and killed.

He heard a swishing sound, like that made by a man's arm as he hurls something into space. Almost simultaneously, an object clicked against the wall behind him and then rattled on the stone floor.

Calhoun stepped back a bit. His foot encountered something. He bent down quickly, and by sense of feel alone knew what had missed him by inches. It was a spear; probably one of those he'd seen in the cave by the light from the torch.

Calhoun felt his flesh crawl and he broke out into a cold sweat. There was a stealthy noise to his right. Whirling, he drew his gun and snapped a shot in that direction.

The gunfire lit up the cave for a fraction of a second and he saw an eerie thing about twenty feet away from him. It seemed to be draped in some kind of a dull-colored

blanket, which enveloped not only the whole body but the head as well.

Calhoun flattened himself against the cold wall and waited. In this pitch darkness he didn't even know what direction the mouth of the cave lay. But he couldn't just stand there and wait. Calhoun wasn't built like that.

He moved forward a couple of steps, heard the scuffling sound on the stone floor, and braced himself.

He was none too soon. A squirming, jabbing form hit him violently. Something sharp glanced off his shoulder and he knew it drew blood. He reached out with one hand and grabbed. His fingers encountered solid, hard substance. Certainly it was not human flesh.

He made a wide swing with his gun, heard it strike something, and the impact made a noise like a collision of a pair of dice. Then the footsteps retreated.

Calhoun leveled his gun, reached into his pocket and drew out a match. He scraped this against the wall, held it high and fired point-blank at the outlandish figure that was just making its way out through the mouth of the cave.

The figure paused, and then Calhoun saw one of the most horrible sights of his life. The blanket which surrounded the form started to collapse like an empty tent. Slowly, as if the body beneath it were fading into thin air, the blanket fell into an inert heap on the ground.

Summoning all the nerve he possessed, Calhoun lighted another match and walked toward the blanket. Just before he reached it he heard a wild shout, followed by a still wilder shriek. It came from outside the cave.

Heedless, now, of the blanket or what it had contained, Calhoun stepped over the thing and edged his way through the mouth of the tunnel.

That shout had unmistakably been Professor Joyce's voice. Perhaps, returning with the flash, he'd encountered whatever menace was leaving the cave.

Calhoun emerged a moment later, and saw two struggling figures just beyond the hillock. One was Joyce, fighting furiously and trying to get in a blow with the flashlight he held. The other figure was dressed in buckskins; a brown, wiry man who was rapidly getting the best of Joyce.

Calhoun started running. Both antagonists heard him. The man in the strange garb took one look, gave

Joyce a terrific shove and sent him reeling back. Then he raced like mad for the forest.

Calhoun pumped two quick shots after him, but the man was zigzagging as though he had expected this to happen. He vanished a second later. Joyce had fallen, and was getting to his feet when Calhoun reached him.

"That . . . fool!" Joyce gasped. "He's mad as a hatter! I saw him standing just outside the cave and challenged him. He came at me like a charging bull."

"Who is he?" Calhoun asked. "I saw that outfit he wears before—just after the time when somebody took a couple of pot shots at me."

"Him?" Joyce brushed off his clothing. "We call him Indian Joe. He's no Indian—just some half-crazed white man who lives like an Indian in these woods. Dresses in buckskins, carries a rifle and an ax. I— Officer, your shoulder! It's bleeding!"

Calhoun nodded. "I had a little argument of my own. Let's go into the cave. There's something much more interesting than a lot of skeletons there. Say—this Indian Joe—how long has he been hanging around these parts?"

Joyce shrugged. "Three years, more or less. Why?"

"He might be the man I'm looking for—Mike Malloy. I grant he's much thinner than Malloy used to be. I didn't get a very good look at his face either, but Malloy disappeared just about three years ago, too.

"Maybe Indian Joe lives in that cave. Or just beyond it. I'm sure there are a couple more caves leading off the main one. I'll go in first. There's an object lying at the end of this tunnel; one I'd like to examine. Somebody tried to kill me in there."

"In the cave?" Joyce gaped. "God heavens! Are you certain? Unless it was Indian Joe. He's crazy enough to inhabit a cave which was used as a burying place centuries ago. Lead the way, officer."

## CHAPTER III.
### VICTIM OF A GHOST.

Calhoun, helped by the flashlight this time, reached the old, worn blanket. He picked up the edge and part of the material fell away in his hands. The rest was fairly substantial though, and he raised it all the way up.

Calhoun gave a choked cry of horror at what he saw. Joyce knelt beside him and uttered a sharp gasp.

Beneath that blanket was a human skull, with a bullet hole through its forehead!

Professor Joyce touched the small hole drilled through the skull and looked up at Calhoun.

"This skull is that of a man who died not much short of a thousand years ago. I can tell by the shape of the bony structure and that spear lying just beside the blanket. You must have thought you saw the skeleton standing erect, when it was probably propped against the wall, like the others."

"And maybe I also thought up this wound on my shoulder," Calhoun grunted. "And the bloodstain on the tip of that spear. It's still wet. The spear was used in an attempt to run me through."

Joyce whistled softly. "You're right! This is a hunting spear. The dead man must have been a hunter those many, many years ago. The cave was used not as a dwelling place, but as a cemetery for chieftains and great hunters. I don't

like it here, officer. I rather think that before I fully examine the cave, I'll rig up a bank of lights and have a couple more men here. Let's get out."

Calhoun was willing enough, but first of all he insisted upon examining the two passageways. One was blind, but the larger corridor led into a small cave. Calhoun saw no signs of habitation. The torch he'd carried lay on the floor: the only proof that he'd actually been there. He followed Joyce out of the cave.

Joyce was highly nervous and his face was covered by a thin film of sweat. He started walking rapidly toward the car. Calhoun fell into step with him when they hit the wide trail.

"I've been thinking," Calhoun said. "that only one man knew we were going to visit the cave: Sully. If that attack was made by the killer I'm looking for, there's a chance Sully tipped him off. Let's go see him."

"Sully is a simple, lazy lout," Joyce commented, "but I don't think he would consort with murderers. Yet—you never can tell. The man has a decided love for money."

They drove back to where they'd dropped Sully, found a path leading up to a well-constructed shack. There was a mangy-looking hound tied to a kennel at the back of the place. The animal didn't stir when the two men approached.

Calhoun rapped on the door, got no answer and pushed it open. There were two rooms. One was used as a combination kitchen, dining room and parlor. The other was a bedroom, and on the floor lay Sully.

No examination was required to prove he was dead. One look sufficed, for buried in the back of his head was a tomahawk, an ax made of stone.

Several other wounds indicated that Sully had been tortured before that final blow finished him off. His hands were cut and swollen, there were dark bruises on his face, as though the flat end of the tomahawk had been used to strike him.

Professor Joyce, pale and shaky, knelt beside Calhoun and without touching the tomahawk, made a quick examination of it.

"I know these things," he said quietly. "That hatchet was made by an Indian at least one thousand years ago. It is remarkably well preserved, but you can see that the handle is made of very hard, durable wood. The rawhide holding the head of the tomahawk in place is still strong.

"Officer, I don't know what this is all about, but I can almost guarantee that the tomahawk came from that cave we just left. I wonder if it's possible that— Oh, I'm insane to even consider the idea!"

"What you mean," Calhoun grunted, "is that those skeletons somehow rose up and tried to kill me, and *did* kill Sully because he'd disturbed their resting place. I don't believe in things like that. My idea concerns a modern-day killer named Malloy—not an Indian hunter from Beyond."

Calhoun made a careful inspection of the shack. He wondered why Sully had been tortured first. Was it because he had the reputation of being a miser and Malloy had wanted some ready cash; not the currency he'd stolen?

By the looks of the bedroom, the killer had certainly made an attempt to find something that had been hidden.

One of Sully's heavy shoes had been thrown into a corner. The other shoe was on the floor beside

the bed. Calhoun picked up the shoe alongside the bed, looked at it intently, and then slid his fingers into the toe. Men like Sully, he knew from experience, often conceal money in their shoes.

He encountered a soft wad of paper, extracted it, and spread out a five-dollar bill on the table.

It wasn't necessary for him to refer to any list of serial numbers. He knew most of them by heart, and this five-dollar bill was one of the series which had been stolen by Malloy from the bank three years before.

"What is it?" Joyce asked.

"Blood money!" Calhoun answered. "Sully got hold of some of Malloy's stolen cash. Malloy came here to get it back, but he missed this five-spot. By the way, professor, you gave him some money at your house. Can you recall whether or not this bill was part of it?"

Joyce shook his head. "I'm sure it wasn't, because I gave Sully thirty-five dollars—three tens and five ones. Say—do you think Sully could have been harboring that criminal all these years?"

"It's possible," Calhoun admitted. "I'd like to meet Indian Joe, though. If he isn't Malloy himself—which I doubt strongly—he might know where he's been hiding out. Indian Joe is a hunter of scalps, too. He tried to get mine."

"Mine, too." Joyce patted a lump on his forehead. "I really think the crazy fool would have killed me, if you hadn't appeared."

Calhoun left Joyce inside the shack, while he roamed the area surrounding it. The hound barked a few times, mournfully, but didn't even attempt to arise. Sully's dog was much as he had been himself—lazy and incapable. Calhoun's flash swept the grounds, passed over something that gleamed like a million stars. He walked over and picked up a diamond ring.

It was a two-carat stone, worth a small fortune. The setting was of platinum, as was the fairly wide band. Calhoun rotated the ring slowly between his fingers and kept the flash shining on it. He gave a start, brought the ring closer to his eyes, and muttered something.

The ring had been engraved and the initials were those of Mike Malloy. The killer had been here, then! This was visible proof of it. He'd killed Sully because the half-witted fool probably had harbored him.

Malloy had seen Sully traveling with a cop, and that spelled the beginning of the end for Sully. The torture had probably been done because Malloy wanted the money his victim was reputed to own.

Carefully, Calhoun tucked the ring into his pocket. He had decided to say nothing about it. Joyce was ambling toward him as he turned around.

"Find anything?" he asked, and when Calhoun shook his head, Joyce went on: "We'd better get over to my house and phone for help. I'm afraid we're both over our heads, officer. It seems a skeleton attacked you, and was shot through the skull for it. Certainly there is no question but that Indian Joe tried to kill me. We're not safe here, in the darkness."

"You're right," Calhoun agreed. "Let's head for the car."

On the way back, Joyce seemed to forget all such things as murder and violence. He gave Calhoun a lengthy lecture on the Mogollon tribes from which Indians were descended. When they reached his house, Calhoun went to the phone and called the barracks.

Joyce proceeded straight to his laboratory, in one of the back rooms, and when Calhoun entered, the professor was fondling that ghastly skull just as Sully had done.

Ranged on a long table behind him were a dozen glass cases, each one holding a skull. They were all carefully labeled, indicating various stages of humanity right up to the bony cranial structure of a modern man. Calhoun studied this last exhibit for a moment or two. Then he sat down across the room from Joyce.

"They are sending a medical examiner and some men," he told Joyce. "Ought to be here in about an hour and a half. It's a long distance to this neck of the woods. So that skull you're holding is that of a man over a thousand years old?"

Joyce nodded eagerly. "That's right. It's my prize possession! Excuse me a moment."

He arose and opened an empty glass case, carefully placed the skull beneath it, and used a couple of small wooden pegs to support the grisly thing on the glass bottom of the case. He rubbed his hands gleefully.

"My collection is complete. Perhaps, in the morning, I can add to it from other specimens obtained in that cave. I don't think I care about collecting the specimens until after you and some of your men have searched the place first. Mind you, I'm not a superstitious person, but—well, I do know a few things about these Mogollon tribesmen."

"For instance?" Calhoun urged.

"Well—they were a hardy, intelligent race. Greatest hunters in history, and they honored their dead far more than any other tribes. They buried them in caves, to await the day when they'd rise up again to go on the hunt once more."

"And you think one of them did rise up and I'm what he's hunting?" Calhoun peered through the top of the glass case. "Maybe you're right, but I'm far from satisfied about things. My hunch is that Malloy is behind the whole business. Therefore, I'm not going to wait for help to arrive."

Joyce looked at him aghast. "You're not—going back to that cave? Look here, officer—I'm as modern as the present minute, but—those Mogollon warriors were a strange people.

"From piecing together various relics, we have learned that their medicine men were invested with strange powers. They traveled with the warriors in battle, to minister to the injured and to attend the dead. I wouldn't go into that cave alone again for a million dollars!"

Calhoun grinned, picked up his hat. "Well, the State pays me a salary and my keep. I'm expected to investigate things like this, no matter what the danger. So I'm going back. You stay here and wait for the boys to arrive. Take them to Sully's place first, and then to the cave. If I'm not around, you might . . . ah . . . send them in to sweep up what's left of me."

Calhoun patter his holstered gun, made sure his flash was working, and started for the door. Joyce hurried after him, took a firm grip on his arm.

"Officer, I can't stop you from going, but—don't you think you ought to listen to me? Come back into my study. I'll show you what other scientists have discovered about the Mogollon tribe. You may change your mind."

With a shrug, Calhoun followed Joyce into the study and laid his flashlight down on the table. Joyce

produced several volumes, handed them to Calhoun and pointed out the sections he was to read.

Calhoun digested the information and it didn't make him feel any better, but the impulse to have a look for himself was still stronger.

"Sorry," he said, "I'm still going. Perhaps those relics found in different places do indicate the tribe was a strange one, given to weird rites and beliefs. But this is 1942 and I'm sure nobody dead for a thousand years or more will rise up to plunge a spear into my heart. Just put it down to the fact that I'm not superstitious."

He thrust the flash into his pocket, hurried out to the car and drove away. Joyce stood on the porch waggging his head from side to side slowly.

Calhoun didn't go straight to the cave. He drove first to Sully's shack, took a quick look at the grisly corpse inside, and then went around to the back where the dog was tied up.

The hound made no protest beyond opening one eye sleepily. Calhoun prowled around the ground for a few moments before he found what he wanted. Then he drove fast in the direction of the cave.

## CHAPTER IV.
### GHOST EXPOSED.

A quarter of a mile away from the trail leading up to the cave, the State trooper stopped, turned off the car lights, and proceeded the rest of the way on foot. He drew his gun, spun the cylinder experimentally and made sure every chamber held a cartridge.

He moved up to the entrance of the cave, flattened himself against the rocks and squirmed through the narrow opening until he was inside the main passageway. He took out his flashlight and snapped on the switch. Nothing happened. He muttered a curse, opened the end of the torch and tried to fix it; but whatever was wrong couldn't be remedied here.

Calhoun dropped the flash into his pocket and kept on going. He had plenty of matches. If that old blanket was still there, he could make a fire out of it and maintain fairly constant light.

His foot hit the blanket a moment later and rattled some of the bones beneath it. He shivered, unbuttoned his holster flap and derived some comfort from the feel of that gun butt under his fingers.

Forcing himself to pay no attention to the bones under the blanket, he lifted the thing and carried it into the middle of the cave. He knelt, fumbled in his pocket and extracted a pack of matches. He scraped one, held an edge of the blanket toward the flame, and then a cold, soft wind over his right shoulder put the match out.

Calhoun didn't arise. Instead, he gave a convulsive leap forward from the crunching position he had assumed. At the same time, he hurled the blanket in another direction.

He heard a swishing sound and the clatter of a spear against the cave floor. It was followed by a grunt of rage. Calhoun banged against the wall of the cave, raised his gun and waited. The first stealthy sound he heard would be his target.

The eerie atmosphere of his surroundings sent a chill over his body, but he stood there, erect and ready. If only that damned flash hadn't failed him. He dragged the flash out of his pocket and hurled it as hard as he could.

There was a great clatter as it hit the wall. This was followed by a

scrambling sound, as though someone were moving very fast. Calhoun fired twice. The momentary glare of the explosions illuminated the cave for a second. Once more, he saw that grim figure, cloaked from head to foot in a gaudy blanket.

Instantly, the weird occupant of the cave was on him. Now, there was no feel of bones, no musty smell of an old blanket. The attack was made by a man with solid flesh and powerful muscles.

Calhoun swung his pistol, missed with the blow and almost fell. A foot kicked at his shins. He stumbeld again, and the pretended ghost was on him. Calhoun went down under the attack.

He tried desperately to lift his gun, but what felt like a good-sized stone crashed against his forehead. Things began to spin. The blow was repeated, and Calhoun went off into a darker world than that which existed in the cave.

When he awoke, Calhoun tried to sit up. Something held him down. He struggled for a moment and found that he was securely tied. By slow movements, he tested the ropes. They were cleverly applied, and very strong. He managed to wriggle over against the wall and into a sitting position.

Then a harsh laugh reached his ears. It came from outside the cave.

"Copper, you awake in there?"

"I'm awake," Calhoun answered. "I'll be free, too, in a few minutes, and then we'll see what a thousand-year-old ghost looks like when it's taken apart!"

"Yeah? Listen, copper—you're all done! In that cave, where you'll never be able to get at it, is a bundle of dynamite. I wired it nice and proper, led the wire out through this exit, and I'm setting a time clock now. Ten minutes, copper, and then you'll be buried with all them Indians! Maybe some day they'll dig you up and wonder how you ever came to get mixed up with the redskins.

"Ten minutes, and while you're in there all by yourself, think of me. Yeah, me—Mike Malloy! So long! You can start counting the seconds right now!"

Calhoun did start to count, but at the same time he let himself fall to the floor of the cave and began rolling over and over. The darkness impeded him tremendously, because he was trying to direct his movements toward a certain spot.

Then he felt the old blanket beneath him.

Professor Joyce and two cars full of troopers came racing along the old road. They saw Calhoun's coupé, rolled right on past it, and stopped at the beginning of that trail which led to the cave.

They piled out quickly. Flashlights cut the darkness as they raced to the mouth of the cave.

Joyce gave a strangled cry, and pointed. "The rocks! They've been moved so that they block the entrance! We can't get in!"

"We'll get in," a sergeant grumbled. "Come on, boys!"

They were within twenty yards of the cave when the earth rumbled under their feet. The whole top of the cavern suddenly rose up as though it had been a lid loosely laid down in place.

Stones and dirt pummeled the troopers unmercifully. For three or four minutes they were unable to move, and when they did reach what was left of the cave entrance, there were groans from them all.

"If Calhoun was inside, he's buried under tons of earth," Sergeant

Brady said softly. "But I'm telling you, professor, no ghost set off that blast. It was Mike Malloy. I hope he wasn't inside, too, when it happened, because Malloy doesn't deserve a finish like this. It's too easy!"

"Corporal Todd, you and one man stand guard here. If you detect any moans or cries for help, one of you head back to Professor Joyce's house. The other start digging—with your hands, if necessary."

They passed the spot where Calhoun's coupé had been parked. It was gone.

"Malloy grabbed it," Brady said curtly. "We'll get him."

Nobody spoke much during the drive to Professor Joyce's house. They piled out there and filed onto the porch. Joyce opened the door with a hand that shook very badly. He stepped into the hall, dropped his hat on a chair and walked to the study.

There, he stopped, as if an invisible wall barred his way. Sergeant Brady barged past him and stopped dead, too.

Corporal Steve Calhoun was sitting in an easy-chair, smoking a cigarette. His clothing was half burned off him. There were bad bruises and burns on his wrists, lumps on his head, and the hair above the temple was matted with dried blood.

"What kept you, sergeant?" he grinned crookedly.

"But . . . but we thought you were in the blast—that the cave fell in on you—" Brady stammered.

"It darned near did!" Calhoun snuffed out the cigarette. "While you were holding funeral services over me, I was making tracks for my car. It's in back of this house now. Didn't you even miss it?"

"Yes, sure we did, but we thought Malloy had made his escape in it. I was going to send out an alarm."

"How . . . in the world . . . did you get out of the cave?" Joyce asked in awe. "We watched the exit, and I'll swear you didn't come out!"

"There was another tunnel, leading to a smaller cave, and from that still another tunnel that took me out. I was pretty well mauled in there, tied up and left to die in the blast. The killer very kindly told me just how much time I had left. He even identified himself."

"Malloy?" Brady asked.

"That's what he said." Calhoun got up. "He attacked me first when I was trying to light an old blanket to give some illumination. I dropped the matches beside the blanket. I rolled over there after he tied me up, managed to set the blanket on fire, and toasted my arms until the ropes burned away. Darned near became a human torch, too!

"Then I crawled out the back exit. There's one thing I'm sure of, sergeant: Malloy certainly was around these parts. Look at this!"

He scaled the diamond ring across the table. "That was Malloy's property. I found it near Sully's shack. Sully was murdered for a very definite reason. But I'm not entirely sure of what it was, yet. Professor, may I look at that skull again—the one that Sully brought you?"

"Of course," Joyce answered. "It's in this glass case. I hope it won't be necessary to handle the skull. It's over a thousand years old, you know."

Calhoun dragged a floor lamp over beside the glass case, studied the skull intently, and then smiled.

"I was right. Now, that skull over there—it's the head of a man who died recently, isn't that so, professor?"

"Yes." Joyce patted the top of the case. "I use it for comparative purposes. You can readily see the difference in the structure. By looking at the—"

"I'm just looking at the teeth," Calhoun grunted. "Several of them have been filled. Malloy served time in stir. A record of any fillings in his teeth are on file. I wonder if they'd—"

Joyce suddenly made a dash toward an open window. He was halfway through it when Calhoun grabbed his ankles, dragged him back into the room. He writhed and kicked like a maniac, howling curses very unbecoming to a university professor. Calhoun rolled him over, straddled him, and clamped handcuffs around his wrists.

"You can get up now, professor," he said stonily. "Maybe you'll even tell us all about it, eh?"

"You're as crazy as . . . as—"

"As Sully? Or Indian Joe? No, professor, I'm not. That's why I'm still alive. You saw me examining an old shack this afternoon, and you did your best to shoot me. Not because you hated me, but because my uniform looked something like the clothes which Sully wore. And Sully—well, he'd just found the cave and was carrying away a skull which you'd much rather had been left buried.

"I picked up Sully later on. He showed me the skull, and while I didn't examine it carefully, I did notice that Sully's hands were anything but clean and he was smearing the thing pretty badly. Yet this skull you maintain came out of the cave is very clean, while the one of the modern man does show those streaks."

"I got them on there myself," Joyce sneered. "I often handle those skulls in my work."

"Maybe. But you swear this one in the case beside me is what Sully found in the cave and brought to you?"

"Of course!" Joyce snapped. "Stop this silly business and take these cuffs off my hands!"

"Later, they will be removed. Sergeant—and you, professor—just bend over this glass case. Notice that the bottom of it is also glass

and reflects slightly. Look closely at the bottom of the skull, which is reflected, as I said. See there—it has something scratched into its surface.

"It says, 'Property of Rawling College. Anatomy Department.' That's where you teach, professor. This skull came from your college laboratories, not from the cave. The one Sully gave you is over here—the one you claim is that of a modern man. I'll grant the truth of that statement, because that is the skull of a killer known as Mike Malloy!"

"Malloy is alive," Joyce argued. "You told us so yourself. He tied you up in the cave."

"No, he didn't. You were responsible for that, and just in case I did get away, you wanted me to be sure I'd think it was Malloy. Professor, Malloy came up here right after the bank stick-up. You killed him, took his money and put his body in the cave with the Indian skeletons.

"Just plain Indians, too—not worth very much as laboratory curiosities. That bunk about their being of the Mogollon tribe isn't worthy of you. The Mogollons lived in the southern part of the United States, mostly in New Mexico.

"You planned to leave Malloy's body there for years. If it was found, it would be accepted as one of the dead Indians. But you forgot that Indians didn't have dentists."

Sergeant Brady quietly moved over to Professor Joyce's side and took his arm in a firm grasp.

"It makes sense, Calhoun," he said. "Keep talking."

"Joyce came up here every summer, and during other vacations. He peddled that hot money around while we thought it was Malloy still on the loose. Joyce paid Sully cash for that skull, and he was in such a hurry to get it out of sight that he had to use some of the hot dough.

"Sully never knew the difference until Joyce left me at the cave, pretended to go after the flashlight—which I'm betting he had all the time. He hurried over to Sully's place, made him tell where the money was, and then killed him. Sully kept the dough in his shoe and Joyce missed one five-dollar bill.

"The diamond ring, belonging to Malloy, was on the skeleton of his hand. Sully's hound dog picked it up and carried it to his kennel behind Sully's house. I found the rest of the hand, pretty badly gnawed.

"I hoped to lead Joyce into a trap by going back to the cave. He planned to follow and dispose of me; probably had a plan all set to blow the cave to pieces if anything happened, and he used that method of murder on me. He fixed my flashlight so it would work a couple of times and then go out."

"What about this Indian Joe?" Brady asked.

"A harmless hermit," Calhoun said. "He saw me go into the cave and hung around. Joyce, returning from Sully's place, entered the cave through the rear tunnel, attacked me and pretended to be a skeleton. He just enveloped himself in a blanket—probably one of those he used to wrap Malloy's corpse in and haul it to the cave.

"He found Indian Joe outside and attacked him. It looked pretty good when I came out. I really thought Indian Joe was behind it.

"Now, suppose we drag Joyce to the barracks. He's a pretty good substitute for Mike Malloy."

THE END.

# MURDER FOR A MILLION

## by Gary Barton

***Would a bait worth a million dollars attract a killer? That's what Boles had to find out!***

### CHAPTER I.
### SHOTS IN THE NIGHT.

Storm clouds lowered over the scantily lighted section of Tannerville's single main street. Tannerville wasn't even a town. It was a settlement of stores catering to workmen and their families in this manufacturing area south of the big city.

In one of them, a stout man picked a cigar from the box the storekeeper

held for him and dropped a dollar bill on the glass counter. He bit off the end, got a light, and was turning absent-mindedly away when the salesman checked him.

"Want more cigars or your change, Mr. Boles?"

"Huh? I'll take the cigars. Thanks."

Boles pocketed the smokes the store man handed him, walked slowly to the open, unscreened door, then stopped there, puffing rapidly and scowling into the outside darkness.

A car came up from the left at fast speed. Boles didn't turn his head to look at it, but when it was opposite him, a pale light bloomed from one of its dark windows and there was a sharp snap and crackle of glass at Boles' right and above his head.

From around the door jamb, Boles watched the blob of shadow that was the car fade into the thick darkness. The taillights were not lighted.

The storekeeper was calling something. Boles disregarded it, even if he was conscious of the words. He went out and turned to his left up the street.

John Boles was reputed to be the richest man in the section. He was a stolid, reticent man who didn't talk about himself and his affairs; but he had a big house in the residential suburb still farther south. During the day, he might be seen at his works on the flats, a couple of miles beyond the settlement; yet he rarely came to Tannerville, and hardly ever in the evenings. But everybody was familiar with his stout figure and round, moonlike face.

The one local movie house was filled and had left the street deserted. Boles didn't seem to notice that. A coupé was parked, purposely or otherwise, midway between the widely separated light posts. Boles was heading toward it.

Once, he drew his watch out, glanced at it, then went on, puffing steadily, eyes downcast and still frowning.

Just short of the car, a man shuffling along from the opposite direction pushed up to him.

"How about a handout?" he grumbled surlily.

Without even looking at the panhandler, John Boles put out a hand to brush him aside. Then a hard object was shoved into his stout side.

"Aw right, bo," the fellow snarled. "If that's th' way you feel 'bout it, you can make it all the jack you got!"

John Boles let out a puff of smoke. He didn't raise his arms but he started to turn slowly toward the holdup man. Then a hand came from behind the stick-up artist, clamped the wrist and jerked the gun hand down and away.

The pistol did not explode. It dropped on the pavement with a metallic clatter. The thug was whirled, given a shove that sent him stumbling and a kick that straightened him up running. He kept on, then darted into an alley out of sight.

John Boles looked at a lean six-footer. Even in the dim light, he saw the warped grin on the young man's tanned face. Boles exhaled a long breath, like a sigh of relief. For the first time since he'd lighted it, he took the cigar from his lips.

"Felt sure Sam Cordray would send one of you boys," he said, a little heavily. "You must be the oldest. Lafe, eh? Well, you made it in good time, just now." Boles didn't

seem particularly disturbed over the attempted stick-up. He hadn't even glanced after the fleeing man. "Come on; let's go."

He turned to the car and put a foot on the running board. Lafe dropped a hand on his shoulder and gently pulled him back.

"I wouldn't be in a hurry, Boles," he said mildly. "Got a flash?"

"Why—yeah. Sure!"

He reached a hand into the door pocket and produced a flashlight. Lafe took it, turned toward the hood. He raised the hood, then made a funnel of one hand over the bulb before lighting the flash. Its protected beam made a thin pencil of light that fell directly on a foot-long cylinder taped to an upper brace. Obviously it had nothing to do with the mechanism of the car.

Boles, at Lafe's elbow, gasped.

Lafe, with his thin light, traced a wire running from the front end of the cylinder to the engine block. He detached it and wound the bared end into his handkerchief before letting it dangle. Moving a little back, he traced a second wire from the bulging other end of the cylinder to the back of the dashboard, which he also removed.

Handing the flash to Boles, he unwound the tape from the strut, bound strips on the bare wire ends and taped them to either end of the cylinder, which he placed in the car seat.

"All right, Boles," he said. "You can hustle now, if you want to."

"Well . . . uh . . . I think we ought to do something about this." Boles put a foot hesitantly on the running board.

"We have. Get in."

"Wait a minute. Think it was the fellow trying to hold me up just now?"

"I *know* it wasn't."

Boles turned the ignition key and pressed the starter, and an involuntary shudder shook his stout frame. He put the car into swift motion, heading down the street past the movie house and the cigar store.

Lightning flared briefly. The thunder that followed was short and sharp. Raindrops began to spot the windshield and Boles set the wipers working.

"You say you know it wasn't the same fellow?" he said.

"You wrote to meet you at exactly quarter past. I got there a few minutes early. When you parked and walked down, a car slid up and two fellows fiddled under your car hood

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a minute, hopped their car and went away."

"Which way?"

"This way."

Boles' foot pressed harder on the pedal and the coupé went faster. He thought of the car that had passed the cigar store and from which a silenced pistol had shot.

"Couldn't you have stopped 'em at it?" he asked. "Caught 'em right in the act?"

"Sure! But I couldn't see what they were doing from the alley, and I thought I'd wait and let you tell me about it."

Boles did not answer that directly.

"That's a bomb, isn't it?"

"Looks like it. Got a dry cell hooked on, too. I could tell you in a minute, but you wouldn't know it if it was, and I neither. I'll call it a bomb, but I don't know why it was hung there."

"I asked your father for help," Boles said, "but I didn't think it was going to be as bad as this. I didn't want anyone local."

"That doesn't change it. You helped us keep our mine, Boles, and we Cordrays don't forget easy."

"You a detective, Lafe?"

"Nope. No part. But we run into funny things round a mine."

Rain splashed from the hood top and drenched the glass before them.

"Thought I'd work you in with the men as a stranger," Boles said, "to see if they were up to anything. I'd like to have one of Sam Cordray's boys coming up with me."

"You got something they want, huh?"

"I've got something somebody wants," Boles said, "bad enough to blow me to bits!"

"Where is it?"

"Where we're going. They near caught me napping. Maybe they have."

Boles had his lights full on, but they didn't bore far into the torrent of slanting rain. Tannerville's small buildings were behind them. There were no street lights here.

"I don't see where that holdup fellow fits in," Boles said.

"Meaning that you have the rest of the picture, huh?"

"I'll tell you about what I know, later."

"Was the fellow anyone you'd seen before?" Lafe asked.

"I didn't get a look at him."

"All I can tell you, he was a young fellow probably made up, and he wasn't used to the business or he wouldn't have dropped his gun that easy."

"And you think he had nothing to do with that bomb?"

Lafe didn't answer that right away. There was another lightning flash, which Boles thought was prolonged unusually, with a blinding light straight in his eyes.

"Cut her over," Lafe told him sharply.

Lafe's head and shoulder were out the window. One hand shielded his eyes. The other held a hefty .45. He'd seen, in the lightning flash, what Boles had missed: a car slewed completely around and sagging under a broken axle.

He also had a blurring glimpse, before the spotlight had blinded his vision, of a man standing in the partial shelter of an open car door, with something in his hands that Lafe didn't like the looks of.

Boles turned the wheel sharply, and in the same instant Lafe's gun roared. The blinding spot was snuffed out like a candle in a gust of wind. Lafe ducked all the way in, expecting a crash. The coupé skidded a little.

There was no collision, but flame

stabbed from the darkness and lead hammered at the rear of the car in a staccato burst. Then they were past, with the shriek of scraped fenders that barely rocked the heavy coupé.

Lafe shifted the gun to his hand and sent back a couple of quick shots.

"Better cut your lights and keep your head down, Boles," he called over his shoulder.

He was watching behind, with the pistol poised, and he saw the stabbing flames as the Tommy-gun opened up again. Most of the shots were wild, but one raked through the rear window and crashed at the top of the windshield between the two men.

Lafe shot carefully, twice, but as he pulled trigger the second time, Boles took advantage of a flare of lightning to swerve the car to the shoulder of the road. It upset Lafe's aim but it took them out of the direct line of the marksman behind them, and all they knew of a third burst was the Tommy-gun's chatter that was lost in a peal of thunder.

Boles had slowed the car, edging it carefully back until all four wheels had smooth going. Lafe reloaded his pistol and shoved it back into its holster.

"Reckon that was your bomb crew?" he asked.

"Could be," Boles answered tersely. "Of course, you couldn't tell how many were there."

"If it was the same crowd I saw fiddling with the hood, I'd say there were two. Why? Make any difference?"

## CHAPTER II.
### THE MAN LAFE.

Boles put on the lights, and soon turned into a side road and picked up speed. Lafe, on his side, saw a high board fence that kept pace with them for a quarter of a mile. Then he lost the fence and a stretch of tumbleweed and slack water took its place.

Then, when lightning opened the sky like a camera shutter, he saw, as if it were an etching, a long row of low, solid-appearing buildings. With darkness again, they showed no light.

"The works," Boles said. He shut off the lights and slowed the car almost to a crawl.

The height of the storm was passing, but the rain still slanted downward in a torrent.

"We'll make the loading platform," Boles said. "Save us from getting soaked. If there were more than two—say four"—he answered Lafe's earlier question—"I might understand it better."

"That doesn't make much sense to me. Two are easier to handle than four."

"I've been working up some stuff for the government," Boles explained. "I gave out different parts to four different men. If they got together, after finding out who they all were, and then had what I know, they'd have the whole thing.

"I finished it this evening too late to send out. That's one reason, after what's happened, why I wanted to come back here. The other is, I wanted to show you around so you'd understand what I wanted you to do. That's not so important, now."

"Did these four fellows know you were finished?" Lafe asked.

"Most everybody at the plant must have known I was nearing the end."

"Then that begins to make sense. And if you'd recognized any one of them back there, you'd be sure of it, huh?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

"What do you figure it's worth, Boles?"

"Been talking round a million, but I'd rather go on and manufacture it. More money in the end. What the—"

He slammed on the brakes and at the same time ducked. They were approaching the dark shadow of the loading shed, and from it a smaller and denser shadow had appeared right before the car.

Even while Boles was moving, a flash of lightning showed him the man's form, arm raised, the black snout of a pistol pointing toward him.

With a little spout of flame, the gun crashed. Something raked Boles' hat; splinters of glass stung his bowed-over neck. Still crouched, he heard the man beside him curse. Then the young fellow slammed open his door and was out in the storm.

Boles peered up a little and saw a shadow streak past his side of the car, where the man who had shot at him was racing, under the protection of the car, from this unexpected help.

Then Boles saw Lafe round the front of the car, fire once at the fleeing form, then run on after him. Boles sat upright, opened his door and leaned his head out. The rain was suddenly slackening, but he could see nothing.

Abruptly, a pistol banged, and because he saw no flash, Boles knew that Lafe had shot again. He waited through more silence. A minute dragged. Then he heard the whine of a motor, the clash of hastily enmeshed gears, and two more shots in quick succession.

The engine sound accelerated, then faded. Boles listened to the rain until he heard steps slosh toward him. Lafe came up and clambered back to his seat.

"Fooled me," he reported. "Thought he'd gone one way, but he beat it in that car he had stashed."

"Think you hit him?"

"He didn't act like it. Anyway, that makes three of your four, doesn't it?"

"Yeah, I guess so. But I still don't get it, damn it!"

Boles ran the car under the overhanging roof of the loading platform. As he got out, he noticed Lafe take the bomb from the seat and tuck it under his arm.

"What do you want to bring that thing along for?" Boles asked, as they climbed steps to the platform. "Meant to have told you to chuck it into that water back there."

"I want to see it under light." Lafe stopped him when Boles turned toward a door. "Wait a minute, Boles. I'd kinda like to know a little more about this, seeing these lads are playing rough. Who are they?"

"The four men who helped me on the deal, though their names won't mean anything to you, are Knapp, Judson and Peters, and a young fellow named Tad Williams."

"You just said you don't get it. What do you mean?"

"This past week I got an idea something funny was going on. Those first three have been with me for years and I hate to suspect 'em. But I can't chance it."

"A million plunks's pretty strong bait," Lafe murmured. "Well, let's get going."

Boles turned again to the door.

"Guess we'll go through here and cross the yard to a side door," he said. "I hate to get wet."

Even as he had inserted the key, the door came open under pressure on the knob.

"Unlocked, huh?"

"Maitland might have left it that way."

"Who's Maitland?" Lafe asked.

"Watchman. Nothing much in here, but it's on his rounds."

"You said there was a fourth guy," Lafe said, low-toned in his ear.

"Yeah, but—" Boles checked his whispered answer. "I'm wondering why Maitland didn't come out, with all that shooting. Come on. Keep close behind me. The floor is clear."

With certain steps, the plant owner led the way to the rear door of the narrow shipping building. That door, too, was unlocked, and Boles stepped out into the darkness.

With Lafe following, Boles took several steps ahead, then stopped abruptly. A low growl had come to his ears.

"Come here, Shag," he called softly. "Watchman's dog," he explained to his companion. "Here, Shag, here!"

A whine followed his words. It sounded eerie in the heavy atmosphere.

"Here, Shag!"

Limping steps sounded faintly. A dog crept up to Boles, whining. It gave a low growl as it sniffed beyond him, then whined again and moved off. Boles and his companion followed.

The dog led them to the looming shadow of one of the main buildings across the yard, then stopped before a door, and its whining became a mournful howl.

Boles swore unconsciously as his foot struck a limp form that did not move. He drew from his pocket the flash he'd taken back from Lafe, and, pointing downward, snapped it briefly.

A man lay on the step before the low threshold, white face upturned. The hilt of a knife protruded from his left breast. He was dead. The flashlight was switched off.

"They sure play rough," Lafe murmured at Boles' shoulder.

Boles reached over the dead watchman and tried the knob. The solid door didn't yield. He fumbled in a pocket, and after a moment got a key in the lock and pushed the door open.

"Help me get him inside," Boles said, and together they carried the body into the building and laid it on the floor. Lafe closed the door. The dog, to judge from the sounds, had crept in after them and sank down by its dead master.

"Come on," Boles said heavily. "Let's get to the office. Time we did something about all this."

The plant owner's private office was set in a corner of one of the buildings, with two doors entering it from the factory on their respective sides. Flanking it, in the opposite corner, was a similar boarded-in space which served as the general office. In the wall between the two were windows covered by iron grilles, and the entrance door, also grille protected.

Boles pushed through an unlocked door and held it for his companion to follow. Then he moved about the dark space and there was the sound of shades being drawn. When he snapped a switch, Lafe, still by the door, saw a huge room richly furnished with a heavy floor rug, couch and easy-chairs.

It might have passed for a living room had it not been for the filing cabinets, set away from one wall, the owner's and a secretary's desk at opposite sides of the big office, a directors' table and the bullet nose of a safe protruding from one wall.

Boles went directly to his desk and picked up the phone. He lis-

tened, jiggled the cradle, waited a few moments, then slammed it down.

"Wires cut or storm put it out of business," he grumbled, and started to cross the room. Apparently lost in his thoughts, he didn't even glance at his companion, who had placed the wicked-looking bomb on the table and was unwinding the tape from the wires and stretching them out full length.

Boles stepped to the safe and bent his stout form before it, back to the room. He twirled the dial back and forth, tried the handle and nothing happened. Frowning curiously, he set at it again.

This time, he worked more carefully and the tumblers fell. He swung the safe door open, partially straightened, and with one hand still on the door reached with the other toward the interior.

Then a hard object was shoved viciously into his stout side.

"All right, Boles," a voice at his back snarled. "I'll take over now!"

## CHAPTER III.
### BOLES ON THE SPOT.

Perhaps Boles knew what the hard object really was; perhaps he didn't. At any rate he turned slowly, while the gun slid around to his stomach, until he faced the lean six-footer. Then, with the swiftness that some stout men have, his left hand struck the pistol aside and his right fist swung at the taller man.

The gun crashed and the bullet ripped Boles' clothing and a burn seared his side. The lean man ducked the blow, skipped back a pace and raised the pistol again. But Boles went all the way around with the swing and, regardless of a second shot, his hand slammed the safe closed and spun the dial. He turned with his back to the safe and eyed the man before him.

"I was a sucker, all right," he said. "But if I hadn't been thinking of what was done to Dan Maitland, I'd probably fallen for you. *You're* not Lafe!"

"It wouldn't have done you any good, Boles. This is the first time you've seen me in the light, and I had the gun handy."

"Yes? And now what you going to do about it?"

The tall man sneered.

"This gun and I are going to make you open that safe!"

"No, you're not; and you can't open it without me. I haven't worked all these years and risked everything I got to put that over, and then give it to a damned thief! You and your popgun can go to hell!"

"I'll give you till I count three, then blast you."

"Save your breath. Shoot now and see if I care. You won't get that stuff!"

The tall man, with his gun still on Boles, moved back a little farther, then swept a swift glance around. Something apparently caught his eye, for a grin twisted his lips when he faced the manufacturer squarely again. He came slowly nearer, step by step.

Boles watched him close the distance between them to an arm's length, then suddenly sprang, at the same time reaching for the pistol. But the lean man was too quick. He side-stepped as if he had been waiting for that movement.

His right hand went up and down, and the steel barrel crashed on Boles' skull. The stout manufacturer stumbled a little, trying desperately to keep his feet, both hands groping for his attacker. The lean man

struck again, and Boles thudded to the floor, out.

The thug laid his gun on the table, whipped a length of stout cord from a pocket and, rolling Boles over, knotted his wrists behind his back. Then he dragged the unconscious man to the desk, lifted the limp form into the chair and tied legs and body not only to the chair, but to the handles of drawers he tried and found locked.

Boles hung in his bonds, head lolling on his breast.

From a shelf on one wall, the tall bandit took a clock with a six-inch dial and broad hands. He knocked the glass out on a corner of the shelf, taking care not to injure the hands. He brought it to the desk and grinned as he faced it toward the still unconscious man.

Returning to the table, he took up the cylinder bomb he had left there and carried it to the desk.

As he started to unwind the tape holding the wires to the cylinder, Boles stirred a little. His eyes blinked, then he jerked his head erect. He waited a moment, drawing deep breaths, then tried his strength; but the cord was too strong, the knots too expertly made, and he settled back, stolidly quiet.

The bandit leered at his futile struggles and kept on with his work. Freeing the already bared ends of the two wires, he attached one to the hour hand and the second to the minute hand, letting short ends protrude so that when the hands would meet, the wires would close the circuit.

It was a delicate job, taping the wire to the slender hands, and took some time. He filled the interval by taunting his victim.

"You were a sucker, all right, Boles, and all the way! Your own men must have known that or they wouldn't have tried to put you out with this bomb, killed your watchman, then tried to blast you when they found you hadn't already been blown to hell."

He paused to adjust the first wire.

"Still, I ain't sore with them, Boles. They left me this, and I'm not taking chances with it missing fire case you want to act stubborn. But they weren't the only ones, Boles, who knew what you were up to. Another guy you oughta know, for you saw him this evening, was working for me.

"He got the letter you wrote to Sam Cordray and gave it to me. It was a cinch to be at the place where you wrote the Cordray boy to meet you, 'specially as you didn't want

anyone to see him. Like the story, Boles?"

Boles did not answer. His eyes were half closed, but there was no question about his being awake. His face was a little gray, but it might have been from the blows he had received, for his square jaw was set hard.

Possibly he was thinking of his years of effort, of the million-dollar fortune just within his reach—a million dollars in actual value now safely behind steel, but with his life the forfeit to keep it there for others to enjoy. Yet it couldn't be seen from his expression that he had any intention of yielding that fortune to force.

"Yeah, Boles," the bandit went on, "it was a cinch to fool you. Course, I had to have somebody who knew you, so this lad I mentioned made himself a tramp and stuck you up so that I could pull the Lafe Cordray rescue act.

"This's my lucky night. Those boys of yours helped me all the way, with this bomb and all. Now they're stuck back there with their broken-down car and have left it all to me."

He straightened, leaned over to look at the face of the clock.

"I ain't got to do no counting, Boles. This clock is doing it for me. See how smooth she's runnin'? Twenty minutes of ten. I'd say she'd let off 'bout a minute before that. But that doesn't give you nineteen to think it over.

"I'm quitting five minutes before that, and I won't be any worse off than I was before I came here. But, you, Boles—" He grinned and took a step backward, and a voice spoke from behind him.

"Get over to that chair and sit down!"

The bandit whirled like a flash, then stopped all movement. His own gun, that he had carelessly left on the table, was lined on his stomach, and the hand that held it was steady. But something in the appearance of the tousled-haired young man behind it not only froze the thug in his tracks, but also brought a puzzled frown to Boles, captive in his own chair.

The young man's dark eyes looked wild, but it could hardly be from the excitement of the situation, for his expression was grim and reckless.

"Go on," he said. "Get over to that chair, like I said. Make a funny move and I'll shoot you and like it! You're caught in the act, mister. Move!"

The bandit slouched over to the chair just beyond the desk, sneering a little as he sized up the young fellow.

"Where the hell'd you come from?" he snarled, trying to make his tone tough. "You wouldn't shoot a guy. That takes guts."

"Try it!" He waited a moment. "You're pretty careless for a thief. I was behind those filing cases and got your whole story. Now, shut up!"

He took a knife from his pocket, put the handle between strong teeth and whipped the blade open. He stepped behind Boles and was about to cut the cords, when apparently the bandit thought he saw his chance.

He started to duck away to one side. The pistol crashed, and with a sharp oath he sank back into the chair and clapped a hand to his arm. Red trickled between his fingers.

"Next time," the young fellow said, "it will be center!"

He slashed the cord that bound Boles' wrists and let the stout man

extricate himself, leaving the rope intact, and allowing himself to watch the man he had winged.

"Go behind him, Mr. Boles," he said, when the manufacturer stood erect. "Don't mind his arm. Tie him so he will stay fixed."

When that job was completed, the young fellow put down the gun and took the wires from the clock's hands. He looked at the contrivance curiously, then put a newspaper from the desk over it, which served to keep the wires apart.

Boles came over and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Williams," he said, "I was glad to see you for more reason than saving my life. But I can tell you that what you, Knapp, Peters and Judson helped me to make, would never have gone into that thief's hands."

Young Williams shrugged, made no reply.

"I was watching you, Tad," Boles went on. "I was afraid I might give you away, or that you wouldn't make it before he turned round."

"He was having too good a time," Tad Williams muttered, with a sidewise glance at their captive.

Boles followed his look. "That man," he said, "as you may have heard, told me some strange things. I want to have a look in the safe to make sure that everything is there."

Williams shoved the pistol into his pocket and followed Boles over, standing by his shoulder while the manufacturer spun the dial and swung open the door. In fumbling for what he sought, Boles took out a packet of bills, which he held in one hand, then found the paper he wanted, checked it and put both back.

"No one could get into this safe," he said, "without knowing the combination. I was pretty certain that hadn't gone out, but so many things have happened, I wanted to be sure. Our stuff is safe, Tad. To blow it open would destroy everything inside. Now we can feel easy."

He started to close the door, and Williams checked him.

"Just a minute, Mr. Boles. I asked you for five thousand dollars and I've got to have it."

Boles turned and eyed him steadily.

"I told you that I couldn't spare it now, even if there was a reason why I should let you have it. Moreover, I have just indicated that you will share in what we will get for our work, which will amount to far more than that. Meantime, I need every dollar available to carry on. I can't possibly do it."

Williams drew his hand from his pocket and the pistol was in it.

"You don't understand," he said harshly. "I need it so badly tonight, that I came here to take it. Now do you get it? I've an idea I can work that combination, but I heard you coming and didn't get a chance to try."

"Do you realize you are confessing to burglary, Williams?"

"What of it? Check it against the help I gave to you to your million. I can't wait for any of that. I'm through, finished, but I'm pulling a relative out of a jam tonight."

With a quick, unexpected movement, he shoved Boles aside, drew out the stack of bills and began to count them swiftly.

Boles stumbled, almost fell, then caught himself and for some reason made no further effort to interfere until Williams had stuck a sheaf into his pocket, returned the rest and shut the door with a twirl of the dial.

"You will be arrested for robbery, Williams."

"If they find me. They won't. I'm getting out of sight."

"But that isn't all, Williams. You will be a fugitive, hunted the world over—for the murder of Dan Maitland."

Before Williams could reply, Boles turned his head sharply and held up a hand.

"What's that?" he asked hoarsely.

Boles had heard the mournful howling of the dog watching by his dead master. Abruptly, the occasional howls changed to a sharper cry.

Boles sent a swift glance at the wounded thug, then, with curious disregard of Williams' act, he motioned to the young fellow.

"Come," he said. "We owe respect to Dan Maitland's memory. Something is disturbing that dog."

And strangely, Williams, without a word, followed him from the office and down the factory building. Boles used his pencil flash to guide their swift way, but in turning into the walled-off section where they had placed the watchman's body, he paused at the door and snapped on a switch.

To all appearances, the place was deserted, except for the motionless form and the faithful dog. Williams looked at the still shape with the knife protruding gruesomely from its breast, and his eyes narrowed and his teeth clenched hard.

The dog was half crouched and had not moved away. But it was facing the outer door and its teeth were bared to the snarling growl that kept rumbling from its throat.

Both men looked toward the door. Williams had the pistol, but he had shoved it in his pocket and the stoutness of the door didn't seem to call for drawing it now.

"Somebody's out there," Boles muttered. "It's a good place to leave them—until we can get the phone fixed and help up here."

"Somebody's in *here!*" a hoarse voice rasped from behind them. "Up with your mitts—fast!"

## CHAPTER IV.
### MORE CROOKS.

The two men whirled.

A stocky, coarse-featured man was holding a submachine gun in readiness, and the muzzle weaved between Boles and Williams.

A second man, smaller but as tough-looking, stood beside him, dangling a big automatic. Apparently he judged the Tommy-gun was weapon enough to do whatever work was required, and he was right. The row of packing cases just behind them told where they had been concealed.

"Frisk 'em, Curly," the machine gunner ordered. "Then tell Ledyer to come in."

"Yeah," Curly said, and stepped forward. "But be damn careful, Al, if you start shootin'. Them slugs'll go through those guys like paper, and I'll be behind 'em."

"Don't be scared," his companion said. "I can lay 'em where I wanta. Get goin'."

Curly took the gun from Williams, felt over Boles without result, and turned to the door. A man as tall as the wounded bandit in the office, and even thinner, came in. His head on the long, lean body loomed unusually large, and was as mean and ugly as sin itself.

"It worked, Al," he leered at the leader.

"Never mind that now, Ledyer,"

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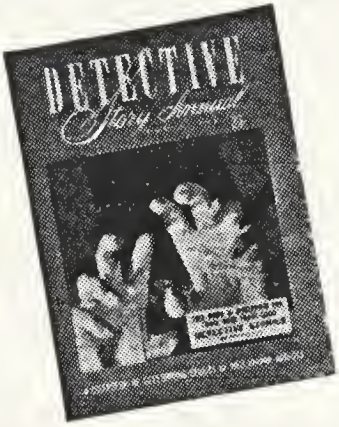


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*Flame stabbed at Williams through the dark, slugs banged and ripped into the wall at his back.*

Al growled. "Go on, you two. Back to the office."

They crowded into the office and Al, with the Tommy-gun steady on his captors, took a glance around.

"You, kid," he said, with a punch of the gun's muzzle in Williams' back, "get over behind that desk and sit down. I might want to use you. Keep your hands up front, and stay quiet, and maybe you'll live a little longer."

Williams moved over and settled in the chair, his elbows on the desk before him.

"You, fat guy," Al said to Boles. "You ain't foolin' us. Get over to that safe an' open her up."

"Listen," the wounded thug spoke up. "Does five grand buy me outa

here? You'd miss it, but I know where the dough is. You can take your haul. I just wanta lam. How about it—five grand?"

Al, from behind Boles, swung toward the lean bandit.

"I'm guessin' you're the rat that plugged at Curly an' me out in the road back yonder, an' I got a piece to speak to you. Right now, we ain't after chicken feed, fella, but we ain't passin' it up. Spill it, or the Tommy'll start talkin'!"

The wounded bandit cursed, saw the muzzle of the submachine gun twitch a little, and nodded toward Williams.

"In his inside pocket," he growled.

"Get it, Ledyer," Al ordered. And to the wounded thug: "Now, hold your yawp and don't bother us." He shoved the muzzle hard into Boles' back, pushing him forward beyond the long table, then stepped back.

"Take him, Curly and Ledyer, and get that safe open fast. I'm coverin' these guys. Come on, come on; we ain't got all night!"

A new storm had broken. There came a blinding flash of lightning and the lights in the room went out. Al roared through the thunder crash.

"Anyone move and I blast!"

The thunder ended, but the room was still dark. Williams, at the desk, must have moved his arms, for the paper rustled. Instantly, he ducked low and to one side. Flame stabbed at him through the dark; slugs banged and ripped into the wall at his back. Then a new circuit was switched on at the power house and the lights were on again. Williams straightened and glared recklessly at the man with the submachine gun.

"Aw right, kid," the fellow growled at him. "I told you. Now you know." Then he snarled at his two companions: "What the hell's the matter with you? We got a fortune right in our hands and you let that fat slob keep stallin' on you! I been watchin' him. One of them stubborn guys that don't like to loosen up. I'll put lead in his pants, if you fellers can't get him movin'.

"Well, that's a little better," he added, as Curly slashed down with his automatic, creasing Boles' temple and sending a sheet of crimson down his cheek.

Boles rocked a little; then turned and faced his assailants. His square jaw was set hard. He didn't speak, and he didn't need to. The determination not to open the safe and give up his million to still other thieves was plainly readable in his expression.

"Ain't enough!" Al yelled. "I'd shoot the guts outa him, 'cept he wouldn't be any use to us. Put the hot foot on him first. If that don't work, burn his damn eyes out! He could still feel with his hands. Get a move on, you bums!"

Curly rammed his pistol in Boles' ample stomach and shoved him backward to the couch, where Ledyer tripped him and sent him sprawling on his back. Curly held his gun to Boles' head while Ledyer seated himself on the manufacturer's legs and began to draw off the shoe and stocking from one of the stout man's feet.

Ledyer lighted a cigarette and was puffing it rapidly to make a longer section of burning tobacco not yet turned to ashes. He twisted his head to leer down at Boles.

The manufacturer's arms were crossed over his broad chest, and his jaws had a stubborn set.

"Got anything to say before the execution?" Ledyer asked.

"Yes," Boles said. "The young man at the desk knows nothing about the combination of the safe."

"Is that all you gotta say, feller?" Ledyer howled.

"That's all," Boles said.

Ledyer drew deep on his cigarette, then, holding the bare foot in one hand, he touched the glowing end with quick, light dabs on the soft flesh between the toes. He turned his grinning face to Boles.

"That's only a suggestion," he said. "I don't wanta fix you so you can't walk as far as the safe, unless I have to. What say?"

Boles said nothing, but beads of sweat ran from his forehead into the crimson mask of his cheek.

"So—" Ledyer said softly. "Tough guy, hey? Well, that's the way I like 'em!"

"Me, too," the leader crowed. "Ledyer, you're good!"

"Wait for this one," Ledyer said.

He took a long drag, then carefully pressed the cigarette hard under the instep. Boles stood it for several seconds, until there was the tinge of burning flesh in the still air.

"All right," he groaned.

Ledyer raised his hand triumphantly. Boles, coming up, tossed him easily to the floor, but the manufacturer made no other move except to stand erect, for Curly had jumped back a step with pistol leveled.

Boles took a single step, limped with his burned foot, and stopped. He glanced over toward the desk.

"I'm sorry, Tad," he said. "Tell the other boys that, if you get a chance."

He walked to the safe, limping on his sore foot; and for another time that evening the door of the safe was swung open.

Ledyer and Curly crowded close at his shoulder, but the leader kept back. Curly shoved Boles roughly aside and the stout man stumbled a little.

"Get back there and sit down," Curly ordered, and Boles limped back to the couch and seated himself. He cocked his hurt foot over a knee, but made no move even to examine it. His face was wooden and expressionless.

Ledyer took out the rest of the bills, then Curly cleaned the safe of its entire contents and found himself loaded with a thin ledger under one arm and a double handful of papers.

"Bring everything over here," the leader ordered, "and let's have a look."

He stuffed the bills Ledyer handed him into a pocket, then frowned over the mass of papers Curly dumped

beside him. He got off the table, gave Williams and Boles quick glances and set the heavy Tommy-gun on the desk.

"We can't take all that junk with us," he grumbled.

"Cut these ropes," the wounded man said, "and I'll come over and pick the right one for you. I had it once, and they took it back—with a gun."

"You wouldn't fool us?" the leader growled.

"Hell, no! I could get half a million for it!"

He took half the papers and carried them to the wounded thug in the chair, and Ledyer followed with the remainder.

Without raising his head, Tad Williams stole a glance around under close-lidded eyes. The leader's thick back was eight feet from where Williams sat, partly shielding the wounded bandit. Ledyer stood beside him, also with his back to Williams, waiting to feed out his papers as the man in the chair scanned them one after the other.

Curly, a head shorter than the tall, lean Ledyer, was standing by the table, with the submachine gun within quick reach. His attention was mainly on his companions and his look was eager. He didn't have to look directly at Williams, who was in his line of vision, while watching the little group.

Tad waited, and when he saw Curly turn his head to glance at Boles, he slid the newspaper unnoticed from the desk. Then he brought both hands close together. Protruding from between thumb and forefinger of either hand was a short length of bared wire.

"Anyone know," he asked, "what will happen if I bring these together?"

Curly looked, and stood as if his muscles were locked; only his mouth gaped open. Neither the leader nor Ledyer turned immediately; then the leader swung around impatiently, his face snarling. And then he yelled.

"That's our bomb!" he howled. "Drop them wires, you fool!"

## CHAPTER V.

### BOMB PLAY.

The leader started to take a step forward, then hesitated.

"Keep back, you," Williams said coolly.

"Shoot him, Curly!" the leader yelled. "Blow his guts out!"

"Don't shoot!" the wounded thug screamed. "He'll jerk and bring those ends together."

Curly had grabbed for the Tommy-gun, but with a hand on it he hadn't raised it from the table.

"There's stuff enough in there," he said with chattering teeth, "to blow this whole damn building to hell!"

"Don't I know it!" the leader howled. "Say, feller," he whined to Williams, "you don't know what you're doin'. There's a dry cell on that wire, and you touch 'em you'll blow yourself to bits! Pull them wires apart! You'll kill yourself, fool!"

"That," said Tad Williams, eyes intent on the wires now less than a half inch apart, "is exactly what I intend doing if one of you moves an inch from where he is now."

"Listen, kid," the leader whined. "We just got the paper and this guy says he can lift a half million for it. Anyways, I can get a hundred grand. Play in with us and we'll split."

"Lemme have the five grand I took

off him, Al," Ledyer said, "and I'll give it back to him now."

"Sure! And that won't change the split we'll give him."

Ledyer thrust a foot before him, and the leader grabbed him frantically and held him back. Wildly staring eyes had not failed to see those wire ends creep a fraction of an inch nearer each other.

"Curly," Williams said, "take your hand off that gun and move one step from the table."

Curly complied with seeming pleasure.

"Mr. Boles," Williams spoke again. "Come up behind the man in the chair, get your paper back and put it in the safe, then get out of here."

"What do you intend doing?" Boles asked.

"I'm staying here."

"You can't do it, Tad. These men are not well balanced. Any moment, one of them is apt to lose his head, and if you carry out your threat, you'll be blown to pieces! I have—"

"That's what I'm hoping," Tad Williams said, "after you've gone. There's nothing more for me. I'm through. I'm going, but I'm taking these tough babies with me—for what they've done to Dan Maitland and to you!"

"The guy's crazy!" the thick-shouldered leader breathed.

"Maybe," Tad Williams said. "Please hurry, Mr. Boles. My fingers are getting cramped."

"Wait!" Boles said abruptly. "I'll get the paper, but—"

A sudden movement at the door all but sent the roomful of men into oblivion. Williams' hands jerked a little as he caught the blurring rush, and the wires almost, almost touched. Three men, in stockinged feet and with noiseless steps, had come in together. Perhaps it was Boles' cry that caused Williams' hands to open.

"Hold it, Tad! Here's Knapp and Judson and Peters—"

Tad Williams rested his hands not very far apart and looked up. He saw the newcomers had revolvers, and he watched morosely while they went about the job with workmanlike speed and efficiency.

Knapp and Peters covered the men, while Judson gathered their weapons and dumped them on the couch where Boles still sat. In doing so, he had a glance at the manufacturer's bloody face and bare foot with its vicious burn. His oath caused Knapp, the burliest of the trio, to glance over.

Knapp didn't curse. He shifted his pistol from right hand to left and crashed his fist into the stocky leader's mouth. The man went down as if pole-axed, and seemed content to lie there. Boles called out something, but not before Ledyer had followed his companion to the floor and momentary oblivion.

"You can tie 'em up easier now, Jud," Knapp remarked coolly, as Judson came up with rope.

Judson proceeded to do it, and perhaps he was thinking of his boss' treatment when he yanked the knots tight.

"Peters," Boles said, when the job was finished, "the phone wire has been cut. See if you can find the trouble, then call the sheriff to come out."

Boles bathed face and foot in cold water, wound his handkerchief around the latter, then limped about the room, recovering his money and papers. He did not return them to the safe at once, but stood by the table resorting the file.

Tad Williams, all this while, had not moved from his chair. His hands, still holding the wires, rested

before him. His look was dark and hopeless. Knapp touched Boles' arm, then jerked his head toward the young fellow.

"I'm sorry to say it, Mr. Boles, but we ought to tie him up for the sheriff, along with these other fellows."

"What do you mean?" Boles asked, a little sharply. He glanced over, noting the grim look that suddenly came on Williams' face, and his motionless hands.

"Well, you see it was this way, Mr. Boles," Knapp explained. "We fellows knew your formula was finished this afternoon late. I asked your secretary if it had gone out and she said no. Then we sorta figured it might be an idea if we stuck around tonight to help Dan Maitland out, in case of trouble."

"Why? Did you expect any?"

"Yeah; we been hearing quite a lot of talking inside the plant and out. And we could make a pretty good guess, perhaps, where these lads here got their orders from.

"Tad Williams was with Peters, Judson and me. We four worked the stuff out—with you, of course. Well, we put ourselves in the general office, and then Tad tied the three of us and gagged us."

"What! Three of you?"

"It was pretty dark, with that storm coming up, and we thought what he held on us was a gun. Ours were all over on a desk. We found afterward it was only one of his damn pipes. But, anyway, we knew he came in here. We figured he was going to try to crack the safe and steal the paper.

"Well, we heard some of the ruckus in here, but we only just now got loose. Better let us tie him, Mr. Boles, much as I hate to do it."

Boles laughed; then he bore his weight unintentionally on his sore foot and winced.

"Do you know what has happened to Dan Maitland?" he asked.

"No. What?"

"He was murdered by one of the men over there. I believe I will have no difficulty in picking the right one, but two of the others are accessories. That bomb you see on the desk before Tad was placed in my car.

"Fortunately, we brought it here and Tad, at the risk of his own life, just now turned the tables on these men, murderers and robbers as you see they are."

"So that's what was going on."

"You see," Boles concluded, "Tad might logically have reasoned that if you met these heavily armed men, you might easily get Maitland's fate, and that he would have a better chance to frustrate any attempt alone. And it worked out that way exactly.

"Tad," he called, "will you step over here a moment?"

"I'd rather stay here, Mr. Boles," Tad Williams said quietly, "until you are all gone."

"The old case of Mahomet and the mountain," Boles said grimly, and limped across the office to the young man at the desk. The others watched and listened curiously.

"Here, Tad," Boles said, "is something I owe you"—and he thrust the packet of bills into Williams' hand.

Tad looked up at him, speechless for the moment. Boles slapped him on the shoulder.

"You've done enough for tonight, Tad. Run along home now, but come down early in the morning. We've got lots of work ahead of us, my boy!"

THE END.

# DEATH RIDES A HEARSE

## by Robert C. Blackmon

***Doc Trouble lives up to his name again when he pulls a live corpse from a dead wagon!***

### CHAPTER I.

### "LET ME OUT!"

The lights of the little roadside filling station were bright and cheerful in the rainy night.

Douglas True looked at them through the spattered windshield of his coupé and sighed. His long, gray-clad body shifted beneath the steering wheel. An anticipatory gleam came into his calm gray eyes as he passed the filling station and drove on toward the city.

The black medical bag on the coupé seat beside him bore gold letters which spelled: "Douglas True, M. D."

The police—particularly Sergeant McCann, foghorn-voiced homicide chief—called him Doc Trouble. They swore he attracted trouble as small, unarmed nations attract invaders. They declared that his appearance anywhere was the signal for trouble—screwball trouble—to begin immediately.

Past events seemed to prove the police entirely correct; but there could be no trouble tonight.

True's straight brown brows made a little frown of irritation.

He had just finished with a patient in the country. He was tired, and he did not like rain. The time was after 9:00 p. m., and he was sleepy, but he would soon be in the narrow brownstone which housed his bachelor apartment and medical offices. The little filling station was just outside the city limits.

An anticipatory gleam brightened in his eyes. The frown went away. His polished black shoe eased up slightly on the gas pedal as he wheeled the coupé around the inside of a curve in the highway. The coupé headlights glinted on the wet pavement and showed the shallow ditches on either side of the road.

The coupé got halfway around the curve, and headlights blazed suddenly in the darkness ahead as a car roared around the turn on the wrong side of the pavement. True could see the lights balloon in size as the car rocketed toward him, coming fast.

Swearing irritably, he pulled the coupé wheel to the right and sent the light car skidding across the earthen shoulder along the inside of the curve. He had hardly cleared the pavement when the other car roared past, missing his coupé by inches.

In the swift moment of its passing, he saw that the other machine was a large black hearse. He saw the pale blobs of two faces in the driver's compartment of the big machine. His head turned, following his eyes. He swore again, sharply. His left foot slipped off the clutch pedal and the coupé motor stalled.

The rear end of the big black hearse was swinging, skidding. The heavy machine was trying to round the highway curve at a speed far too high for its weight, especially on wet pavement. Hearses aren't built for racing.

Even as True looked, the rear end of the hearse whipped around wildly and the big machine went into a series of crazy, swinging skids.

Instinctively, True reached for the left door handle and his medical bag. The hearse was going to crash into the ditch. He knew it. The men in the hearse were going to need medical attention within the next few moments.

He opened the door and stepped to the wet pavement. Raindrops pattered down on the brim of his dark-gray felt hat, spattered on the shoulders of his gray coat. He did not notice that. His eyes were following the skidding hearse.

The big machine whipped around on the streaming highway in two complete spins, its headlights burning an eccentric pattern in the rainy darkness. Water sheeted in an arcing spray as the tires scrubbed over the wet pavement.

Lurching drunkenly, the hearse made another complete spin at a slower speed, then started sliding sideways toward the ditch on the other side of the highway. It was headed in the same direction in

which it had been moving before it skidded.

True held his breath, staring.

The hearse seemed to gain speed as it slid sideways toward the ditch. Its outside wheels slipped off the pavement edge and bit into the soaked earth of the shoulder fill.

Momentum jerked the inside wheels clear of the pavement, and the high, ornate body of the big machine cocked up at an angle that threatened to roll the whole thing over into the ditch.

True's teeth met. He was sure the hearse was going over.

Its inside tires lifted about two feet from the pavement. The big hearse seemed to balance on the outside wheels for a moment. Then, abruptly, the inside wheels dropped, slamming down on the pavement with a force that shot spray across the highway.

The big hearse bounced dizzily on its springs. Its motor bucked twice and stalled. The hearse stopped, upright on all four wheels, headed in the same direction it had been going and within three feet of the ditch.

True started breathing again. Swift anger drove some of the calmness from his eyes. His sensitive lips tightened and he strode across the wet pavement toward the hearse.

Rain was beating down on him, but he did not notice it. The driver of the hearse, he fumed inwardly, should have his brain examined. Only a reckless idiot would drive as he had.

True reached the hearse, looked through the rain-steamed glass of the driver's door, and the name the police had given him flashed into his mind: Doc Trouble.

There were two men in the driver's compartment. Both men were slumped down on the wide seat, motionless. They appeared to be either unconscious, or dead.

True stiffened. Moisture that wasn't all rain dampened his face. He opened the driver's door. The black medical bag swung from the long fingers of his left hand.

The dashlight in the hearse was on and it gave enough light for him to see the driver very well. The man looked to be about thirty years of age, slightly built. He wore a dark-blue suit. A dark felt hat was lying, crushed, in his lap.

His pale, narrow forehead was darkening with a bruised spot near the left temple. There was no blood. The man was breathing jerkily. Apparently, he had been knocked unconscious.

True turned his attention to the other man in the driver's compartment.

The man wore a green suit and hat. He was short and fat and his big head hung backward on a thick neck, the heavy-lipped mouth sagging wide open. His arms were dropped at his sides, the fat hands palm up, the fingers curled on the seat edge.

His round fat face was livid, the greenish eyes bulging and staring fixedly. The eyes seemed slightly glazed. The man's heavy-jowled features wore a strange expression of profound shock and surprise.

Douglas True felt his scalp stirring beneath his hat.

Rain made little silvery bursts on the long black hood of the hearse. It made veined streamlets down over the sides of the somber black vehicle.

True saw none of that. His mind was filled with one thought: the man in the green suit was dead.

He knew that even before he strode around the front of the stalled hearse and opened the right-

hand door to make a more thorough examination.

Moments later, he straightened. His lips were pressed tightly together. Much of the calmness was gone from his eyes, and he was frowning.

The man in the green suit had not been dead very long, certainly not over five minutes. He had apparently died of heart failure.

True looked at him, lips pursing judicially.

The man's fatness, his bulging eyes, indicated a predisposition to heart trouble.

True winced at the last word. It reminded him of a hated name—Doc Trouble.

Deliberately, he closed the hearse door and stepped back.

The death would have to be reported immediately to the proper authorities, to Sergeant McCann. The little filling station back beyond the curve would probably have a telephone. He could call McCann from there.

He smiled as he thought of the sergeant; turned and took a step in the direction of the filling station. He stopped abruptly after the first step, frowning.

Sounds were coming from the hearse. The sounds were becoming louder and louder. They were coming from the huge closed body of the vehicle. True could hear them very clearly.

Someone in the closed body of the big machine was beating on the sides and yelling. The pounding became louder. The yells shrilled into screams. The voice was that of a woman. True recognized words:

"Help! Help!"

The pounding on the sides of the hearse drowned out the screams. True stood motionless.



Douglas True had attracted trouble again, in the form of a corpse riding on the front seat of a hearse with the driver, while a living person took the cadaver's usual place in the interior of the funereal machine.

He heard the woman screaming again.

"Help! Let me out! Let me out!"

## CHAPTER II.

### LEAD SLUGS!

Long-legged strides took True along the sides of the big machine. Stopping at the rear doors, he caught at the silvery handles and twisted them. The doors swung open and he looked into the dark interior of the hearse.

At first, he saw nothing but blackness, then he made out the pale blob of a face, the small, crouched figure of a woman. The screaming and pounding had stopped the moment he opened the door. No sound at all came from the interior of the hearse now.

True cleared his throat and said, professional crispness in his voice:

"My dear young lady, I—"

He got that much out, then the woman screamed again. Her voice was so shrill and piercing that it made him wince. He saw her blurry figure move, come toward him. She kept screaming, a high continuous note that made his skin prickle.

He started to speak again, reassuringly, but before he could utter a sound, the woman scrambled out of the hearse and started beating him about the head with something.

Out of the hearse and in the reflected glow of the headlights, he could see that she was young, apparently about twenty. She was a blonde and fairly pretty, though her dark eyes were distended with ter-

ror, glistening in the light glow. Her mouth was wide open, white teeth showing against her lips. She was wearing a green dress and a little green hat.

She kept on screaming in the high, shrill note, and she kept beating at True's head with what he saw now to be a small black leather handbag. There was something hard in the bag, and it hurt as it banged against True's head and shoulders.

"My dear young lady—" he started again, and grabbed at the flailing bag.

The young woman's screams became even shriller. She kicked at True's shins as he caught the bag and jerked it from her grasp. Her little fists knotted and she pounded at True's chest and face with them. There was surprising power in the blows. She kept on screaming.

"Here!" True yelled. "Stop it!"

He dropped her bag and tried to catch her wrists. He had already dropped his medical bag. Still screaming, the girl hit him in the face, kicked his shins and tried to trip him. True stepped back to regain his balance and his foot slipped off the edge of the pavement. He fell to his hands and knees with a jolt that made his teeth snap together and knocked off his hat.

Rain pattered down on the back of his coat. He could feel it spattering on his neck. Water seeped through the knees of his trousers. The pavement was streaming under his hands.

The young woman stopped screaming as he fell. Whirling around, she ran down the highway toward the city, short skirts whipping wildly about her slim silken legs. She ran faster than True had ever seen anyone run before.

Water spattered out in little wings of spray from under her small slippers as she sprinted over the wet pavement. She was running along the left, and outer, side of the curve.

Swearing, True started to his feet. He shook gritty water from his hands. Anger had swept all of the calmness from his eyes.

As he straightened, he saw the headlights of another car coming around the curve from the direction of the city. It was coming fast. The headlights outlined the girl's running figure.

As the lights hit her, the girl stopped running. She screamed again and started waving her arms, as if to attract the approaching driver's attention. She ran toward the approaching car.

True muttered swear words, stood up, and tried to brush some of the wetness from the knees of his trousers. He succeeded only in making a mess of the knife-edge creases in the fabric. The rain had slackened to a drizzle, but it was beginning to soak through the shoulders of his coat. Water beads covered his hair like dew. He picked up his hat and put it on.

True felt very wet and uncomfortable. He scowled at the running girl outlined in the approaching car's headlights. She was about a hundred and fifty feet away.

True opened his mouth to swear again, but the swear word caught in his throat as bright flame blossomed from the side of the approaching car and he heard the whiplike crack of a gunshot.

His tall body snapped rigid in every muscle and nerve. Two words clamored in his mind: Doc Trouble!

He saw the running girl skid to a stop. Her screaming climbed to a new, high note of ear-piercing shrillness. Flame blossomed from the approaching car again, and the

sound of the shot was louder. Something hit the pavement almost at the girl's feet and True heard the vicious whine of a ricocheting bullet.

The girl's slim, green-clad figure exploded into frantic action. Swiftly, she scrambled from the highway and plunged into the shallow ditch along the left side of the road. Water splashed wildly as she floundered across the ditch.

Two more shots came from the approaching car, aimed at the fleeing girl. One slug splashed water in the ditch. The other tore soaked earth from the ditch bank beside the girl as she scrambled out of the water. She plunged into the brush and trees along the highway and was gone.

True's fists knotted. Gray eyes blazing, he stepped toward the approaching car. The machine was hardly a hundred feet away, now. It skidded weavingly as the driver applied brakes, and True was pinned in its headlights.

As the car came closer, True strode to meet it, his heels hitting the wet pavement angrily.

"You unprincipled scoundrels!" Fury made his voice shake. "I shall notify the authorities of your unjustifiable brutality in firing upon—"

A blasting shot from the car cut

*As the lights hit her, the girl stopped running. She screamed again and started waving her arms.*

him off. The machine was hardly fifty feet from him now, still moving. The powder flare all but blinded him and he heard the whine of a lead slug as it drilled past his ear. For a split moment, he didn't understand the shot. There was no target but the hearse and—

Realization struck with the force of a physical blow. The gunman in the approaching car was firing at him! *He* was the target!

Instinctively, True crouched as the gun in the car fired again. He saw the flash, then the sound of the shot exploded in his head. He felt himself hit the pavement on his side.

Water came through his clothing, cold against his skin. Something warm started crawling on the left side of his head and he knew it was blood. He knew a slug from the gun in the car had hit his head.

There was a confusion of raindrops, splashing footsteps and hoarse voices. Rough hands pulled at him. He heard a man say grimly:

"O. K., I burned him down. So what? This thing's gonna come unstuck anyway, the first thing we know. Grab that girl's bag on the road there. We got to get her fast!

"Move, Gus, you clumsy ape! Hack sure played hell when he hit this curve with the dead wagon! It ought to be him instead of Willie. Willie's always had a bum ticker.

"O. K. O. K. What's in the bag?" The voice was hoarse, filled with a hard, driving force.

"The dame's Phoebe Wales, boss." The second voice was deep and hesitant. "Letter here says she's living at 1256 Weyman Street, Apartment D. Cinch, boss. She'll go there and we take her. The stiff's a sawbones with a wacky name on his bag. We better wake Hack up and get—"

The voices became blurry, then faded out entirely. The pattering raindrops falling on True's body became hammering blows that drove him deep into smothering blackness.

Doc Trouble had attracted lead slugs!

## CHAPTER III.

### PHOEBE WALES.

Douglas True became aware of the fact that someone was holding his head. Something sharp bit into his left temple and the familiar tang of antiseptics stung his nostrils. He opened his eyes, saw a white-coated ambulance intern bending over him.

There were other men behind the intern. Among them, he saw Sergeant McCann's big, square hulk, heard the sergeant's bellowing voice.

"All right!" McCann was roaring. "You run the filling station up the road. You hear plenty of shooting and a woman screaming down here and you yell for the cops. All right, so what? Where's the guy who did the shooting? Where's the woman who did the yelling? Where's anything, huh? How come Doc Trouble's out here, eh? How come—"

McCann's voice dropped the roar abruptly. "Look, sonny," he said almost plaintively, "I got to have something to work on, see? You yell that somebody's killed, but there ain't no stiff. I got to have a stiff to—"

"The cadaver you so ardently desire, Sergeant McCann," True said acidly, "is in the hearse."

True's mouth corners were twitching. There was a twinkle deep in his eyes. Sergeant McCann always affected him like that. The sergeant whirled away from the slim man in coveralls and stamped toward True. Headlights made the highway very bright. The rain had stopped.

"Trying to be funny, eh?" he yelled. "The stiff's in the hearse! Where else would a stiff be, eh?" He towered over True and his broad, weather-reddened face had a light shade of purple in it. His gimlet eyes glistened in the headlight glare. "Answer me that, Doc Trouble!" he rumbled.

True stiffened as he heard the hated name.

"My limited experience in the mortuary profession, Sergeant McCann," True said mildly, "precludes the possibility of being quoted as an authority on related subjects. However, I wish to venture the observation that cadavers are usually transported within the body of the funereal vehicle usually referred to as a hearse. They seldom ride beside the driver of such vehicles."

"Oh, boy!" The intern laughed, then coughed.

"Stop it!" McCann waved big arms. "I don't understand nothing you say! I— Hey! The stiff was riding with the driver of the hearse?"

"It was my intention to convey such information, Sergeant McCann," True told him acidly. "The cadaver rode with the driver of the hearse and a young lady, very much alive, rode inside.

"I can personally vouch for the fact that the young lady was living. She belabored me vigorously with her handbag. She ran away after that, and the men in the other car started shooting at her. She—"

"Dame! Inside the hearse! Stiff riding with the driver!" McCann choked. He was all but dancing on the wet pavement. "Handbags! Guys! Shooting! You dump horned horses and dead guys that won't stay put in my lap! Now it's a hearse with dames in it!

"You got to stop it, Doc Trouble! I got enough trouble without you dumping no screwy messes in my lap! I got a watchman knocked off at the Eastern Roller Mills and sixty grand in cash missing from the office safe. Nobody knows who done that. Nobody seen who done it. Nobody seen the guys get away. I got enough trouble without you—

"Yah! How'd it happen? Who shot at the dame, and where is the guys who done the shooting, eh?"

"The young lady, I believe," True told him crisply, "is somewhere in the woods to the left of the highway. The last time I saw her, she was moving in that direction, rapidly. Her name, I understand, is Phoebe."

True's lips twitched, badly. The intern, grinning, helped him to his feet. He stood, swaying slightly, before McCann. "The cadaver was known as Willie, and Willie seems to have died as a result of heart failure. Willie seems to have been sitting beside Hack, who was driving the hearse.

"The two ruffians who shot at Miss Phoebe called each other, respectively, Gus and the boss. I seem to have missed their last names. It appears that the hearse and the car used by Gus and the boss are gone, and I have no idea as to where they went. Perhaps the filling-station attendant—"

"All right! You!" McCann whirled to the coveralled man. "Where'd they go?"

"Now, wait a minute, sergeant." The slim, coveralled man sounded scared. "I didn't see anything. I just heard the screaming and shooting. I went in the booth and called the cops . . . uh . . . the police."

"I guess maybe the hearse and car passed while I was in the telephone booth. I don't say they *did*,

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but they *could* have." He spread his hands expressively.

"All right. All right!" McCann stamped back to True. "Now, Doc Trouble, I—"

"For your information, Sergeant McCann," True cut in crisply, "my name is listed in the city directory as Dr.—"

"It's Trouble to me!" McCann yelled. "Screwball trouble! Time I got the call that guys is shooting and women screaming out here, I knew you was in it! Every time screwball trouble happens, you're right there! Tonight, it's hearses, stiffs, dames named Phoebe, heart failure and shooting! It's—"

"Exactly!" True's eyes twinkled brightly. He set his dark-gray felt hat, slightly soggy, down on his bandaged head. He would have felt naked outdoors without the hat.

"And since you have such a broad understanding of the matter, Sergeant McCann, I am sure you do not need me any more tonight. With your permission, I shall drive on home. It seems that the highly unusual incidents tonight have fatigued me."

True took the medical bag the intern offered him; he started toward his coupé, a short distance away and on the other side of the highway. The lights were still burning. He saw an ambulance and a detective cruiser parked on the other side of the highway.

"Wait a minute, Doc Trouble!" There was a plaintive note in Sergeant McCann's voice. He stamped after True. "I ain't got nothing but screwball stuff to work on. You got to explain it so a guy can understand, without the six-bit words.

"How come Phoebe in the dead wagon? How come she got out so the guys could shoot at her? How come the guys shot at her? Who's Hack and Gus and the boss? I got to know! There's millions of

Hacks and Gusses and bosses in the U. S. A. You got to—"

"For all we know, Sergeant McCann," True told him gravely, though his mouth corners were twitching, "Phoebe has a weakness for hearses. Perhaps she is addicted to riding in them. The younger generation, so I am told, indulges in some rather quaint amusements.

"As to your second question—I released Phoebe from the hearse. She practically demanded such action. As to why shots were fired at her—well, I am sure Phoebe could explain that much more satisfactorily than I could. After all, she was the initial target.

"I am sorry that I cannot enlighten you as to the identity of Hack and Gus and the boss. Ordinarily, one does not include such characters in a list of acquaintances. And as to your observations anent the multiplicity of Hacks and—"

"Stop it!" McCann screamed. He could have been heard three miles on a quiet night.

The coveralled filling-station attendant jumped and ran back along the highway. None of the other men moved to stop him. They just stood and stared.

"Beat it, Doc Trouble!" McCann roared. "Go home! Go anywhere! Just so you go! Scram before I . . . before—"

McCann stamped around on the pavement, splashing water.

"Thank you, Sergeant McCann. I wish you a very good evening, gentlemen."

Douglas True crossed the wet pavement and got into his coupé. He was chuckling, despite the pain in his head. Sergeant McCann always affected him like that.

He saw the sergeant pile into the detective cruiser with the other men. The cruiser whipped around and raced toward the city, its siren yowling indignantly. The white-coated intern followed it in the ambulance, and True was left alone on the highway.

Chuckling, he started the coupé and drove on toward the city. He kept the speed down very low, for his head was throbbing and the jarring of the car made him grunt with pain.

Moving slowly, he drove the car around the curve in the highway. The headlights washed over wet pavement, swept along the shallow ditch to the left of the highway—and True grunted.

The lights showed a wet and bedraggled figure stumbling from the ditch and up onto the pavement.

True recognized the figure instantly as that of the girl who had been in the hearse—Phoebe Wales.

## CHAPTER IV.
### THE HEARSE.

Phoebe Wales stumbled out into the center of the highway and raised her arms, hailing True. He toed brake and clutch and brought the coupé to a stop beside the girl.

Her green dress was a wreck, soaked with rain and spattered with mud from the ditch. A smear of mud was across one of her cheeks. Her hands were dirty and her hair was wet. The little green hat was gone.

True wheeled down his window glass and the girl saw his face in the dashlight glow. Her slender figure drooped.

"Oh! You! I heard sirens, I thought you were the police," she said dully. There was a slight huskiness in her voice. "All right," she flared suddenly, stiffening defiantly,

"Go ahead and kill me! I can't run any more. I c-c-can't—"

Then she was crying wildly. Tears furrowed through the mud on her cheeks. She began to laugh and cry at the same time.

True thrust his long left arm from the coupé window and caught her shoulder. He shook her, hard.

"Miss Wales," he said sharply, "if you will take the trouble to examine the front bumper of my coupé, you will find an Esculapian emblem, which indicates that I am a reputable physician.

"Those emblems are registered. They are issued only to qualified members of the medical profession. I am a doctor, not a ruffian. My name is Dr. Douglas True, and not— Well, you would not understand."

True's mouth corners turned down slightly as he thought of the name the police had given him.

"Get in the car," he told Phoebe Wales crisply. "I shall trouble myself to the extent of escorting you to your home."

He winced at the word "trouble." He had had enough trouble to last him for a long, long time. He did not want to hear the word again.

Still crying, but not hysterically, Phoebe Wales went around the front of the coupé and opened the right-hand door. True saw that her shoes were very muddy as she got into the car. He waited until she was seated and had closed the door before he drove on toward the city. He moved very slowly, to keep from jarring his head.

"I . . . I'm sorry I . . . hit you . . . doctor." The girl hiccuped, and stopped crying "I . . . I thought you were one of . . . *them!* The hearse jerked around so and I thought it was going to crash. I was so scared, I didn't know what I was doing. I just came out . . . fighting."

"A most understandable reaction to the experiences you had undergone." True nodded gravely. "And how did you happen to enter the hearse in the first place?"

"I . . . I don't know." Phoebe Wales fingered her wet hair. "I was just walking along. Then I saw the hearse, a man getting into it. Another man yelled something, then somebody grabbed me before I could yell. I . . . I guess they hit me. I don't remember anything else until I woke up in the hearse.

"I . . . I knew I was in the hearse because I . . . I looked in one a long time ago. I was s-scared. I started knocking on the sides and yelling for somebody to let me out. When the hearse jerked around, I must have hit my head, because I didn't know anything until the hearse was stopped and I heard somebody opening and closing the doors.

"I knocked on the sides and yelled, then you came and I . . . hit at you with my handbag. The handbag's lost now, I guess."

The girl hiccuped again.

"Then I ran, and I saw the car coming. I tried to stop it, thinking the people in it would help me. But they didn't. They started shooting at me. I don't know why they did that. All I could think of was trying to get away. Every shot missed me, somehow. I was lucky." She shuddered.

"I ran back into the woods. Then I heard the sirens and knew the police were on the highway. I came back to the highway hunting them, then you came."

True nodded again, gravely. His lips were pressed tightly together. He was frowning.

"You did not know the men who put you in the hearse?" he asked

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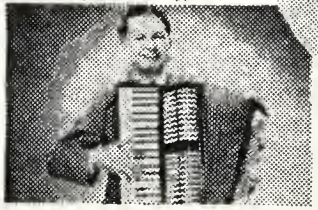

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gently. "You know of no reason why anyone should shoot at you?"

The girl's wet hair stirred as she shook her head.

"No, doctor. I'd never expected to be in a hearse until—well, I died. There's nobody who wants to shoot me that I know of. I don't understand it."

"I believe I—" True started slowly, frowning thoughtfully.

True looked up at the rear-view mirror and saw the car directly behind the coupé. The car was running without lights, its front bumper almost touching the back of the coupé.

Even as he saw the car, it pulled out to the left and shot up alongside the coupé. A man's head thrust from the open right front window. The car, True saw, was a sedan. He heard the man shout:

"Stop it, quick, sawbones, or take lead!"

The man moved his hand and True saw the glint of blued steel. He toed the brake and clutch and brought the coupé to a halt at the side of the road. The sedan cut in ahead and stopped. A man opened the right-hand door, jumped out, and strode toward the coupé.

His figure was huge and apelike in the headlight glow. Big arms were thrust into the sleeves of a blue coat. A dark cloth cap was pulled down on the man's head. A gun glinted in his huge right fist. Then he was beside the coupé, on the left side.

"O. K., sawbones. We got you! I thought the boss'd cooled you back there, but—"

The man's broad face twisted into what might have been a grin. His thick lips bared large, stained teeth. His eyes were very large, wide-set, and expressionless so far as True could tell.

"What now, boss?" he called toward the sedan.

"It . . . it's *them!*" Phoebe Wales' voice was but a thin, strained whisper. "You . . . you won't let them . . . hurt me?" Slim fingers touched True's arm, and he felt her trembling.

"Not," True told her swiftly, "if I can help it!" He heard a man in the sedan say something.

"O. K." The big man went around the back of the coupé and opened the right-hand door. He crowded himself into the coupé, shoving Phoebe Wales up against True.

"Follow the boss' car, sawbones," he growled. "If you try any monkey business, I use this!"

The big man showed the gun in his right fist.

The sedan swung about and headed in the opposite direction. Under the threat of the big man's gun, True followed. Beside him, Phoebe Wales sat stiffly, rigidly.

"You are Gus, aren't you?" True asked the question abruptly.

"Huh? How'd you know that?" The gun in the big man's hand pointed toward True. Beneath thick brows, his large, expressionless eyes were gleaming.

"I heard the boss speak to you, back there." True spoke evenly, casually. He was frowning. "That was before your friend . . . ah . . . Hack almost wrecked the hearse. He was driving much too fast."

Gus grunted, hitched the peak of his cap with a huge left hand.

"Hack always drives too fast," he grunted. "How come you know Hack?"

"Did Willie always have heart trouble?" True frowned as he spoke the last word.

"I dunno." Gus was scowling.

"Willie had dizzy spells. It must 'a' been his heart. The boss says he had a bum ticker, so I reckon he did. How come you know about Willie, huh?"

"Willie died from a heart attack as a result of Hack's reckless driving." True said that quickly. He watched Gus from the corner of his eye.

The big man's scowl deepened. "You talk too much, sawbones!" He moved the gun in his fist. "Follow the boss' heap and keep that mouth shut, see?"

True stopped talking and followed the twin taillights of the sedan.

They passed the bright and cheerful lights of the little roadside filling station and True saw the coveralled attendant standing at the door. True wondered if he could make some sign to indicate to the fellow that he must call the police. He decided that he couldn't. There were no other cars on the highway.

The filling station lights winked out around a curve behind them.

True's mind was churning. If he could get his hands on the medical bag— It contained scalpels, opiates, poisons, a hypodermic. But the bag was on the coupé floor boards, now. Gus would shoot him, or the girl, before he could reach it.

He drove on, following the sedan, frowning through the windshield.

Abruptly, the sedan turned to the right, into a narrow dirt road that led away from the highway.

"Keep following the boss," Gus rumbled.

True reached the dirt road and turned. The coupé lurched and bounced as he drove over a road that was little more than two ruts cut through low brush and weeds. The jarring made True's head hurt. Beside him, Phoebe Wales was still rigid and silent.

The sedan wallowed along the road for about a half mile, then turned again into a pine thicket. True drove the coupé after it, rolled to a stop as the sedan's stoplights flared.

"O. K.," Gus growled. "The end of the line. We get out."

Phoebe Wales whimpered a little, then was silent again.

True stared through the windshield, and the name the police had given him clamored in his brain—Doc Trouble.

Off to the left and lying on the ground in a little clearing in the pine thicket was the green-suited body of the man whom he had found dead in the hearse. The slightly built driver of the hearse was standing beside the body. Beyond was the shiny black bulk of the hearse.

## CHAPTER V.

### SIXTY GRAND!

"End of the line. Get out, both of you."

Gus prodded Phoebe with the gun. The girl shrank away from him and against True. True could feel her trembling. He opened the left door of the coupé and stepped out. Phoebe followed him. A lean, hard man wearing a brown suit and a brown hat got out of the sedan and came toward them. He had a gun in his right fist.

"Here they are, boss. What next?" Gus stood behind True and Phoebe Wales. True could hear his breathing, deep and strong.

"We'll figure that in a minute." The brown-suited man stopped before True and the girl, stared at them. In the glow of the coupé headlights, True could see his face,

browned and lean and hard. His eyes were gray and cold.

"You and Hack'll have to plant Willie first. We can't haul a stiff around with us, and we can't leave him right with—" Small white teeth bared in a little grin. "Take him back in the woods a piece."

"What'll we dig a grave with, boss?" Gus was frowning. True knew that, though he couldn't see the big man. "We ain't got a shovel."

"Dig the hole with your hands, if you can't find anything else!" The boss spoke sharply, irritably. "But get going! We're in a spot. Hack put us there."

"Hold it, boss!" Hack, the slender hearse driver, left Willie's body and strode toward them. "I was speeding the dead wagon, but I had to. The dame was making such a racket inside, I had to get her out in the country before somebody got near the hearse and heard her.

"That wouldn't been so good. Everybody knows they don't haul yelling dames in the dead wagon. If I hadn't speeded—"

"Forget the argument and help Gus with Willie." The boss did not take his eyes from True and the girl. "Make it snappy, and cover the grave with leaves and stuff. I don't want him found for a long time. Move! We got to get away from here. It's the hot squat, if we're caught."

Gus and Hack left, moving sullenly. True saw them drag Willie's fat body off through the woods. His stomach became very hard and cold. He could almost hear the boss thinking.

Douglas True, M. D., and Phoebe Wales were to die. They couldn't live, knowing what they did. After Willie's body was buried—

"Whoever you are," True spoke swiftly, steadily, though his nerves were jerking, "you cannot carry out the vicious plans in your mind. Miss Wales and I will be missed. The police—"

"Sorry, doc, but that's the way it is." The boss' expression did not change, nor was there a change in the inflection of his voice. "I'm Ben Kruger. I've gotten away with a lot of things, and I'll get away with a lot more before they slit my pants and fry me.

"You're a smart guy, doc—not like them dumb clucks I have to work with. You don't need a blueprint. If you were on my side of the fence, I could use you, maybe. As it is—"

He bared small teeth in a grin.

"You and the dame don't get a funeral like Willie. We ditch the hearse and the sedan here, with you. We scram in your coupé. The sawbones emblem on your heap'll get us a long ways before you and the dame are found here.

"I'll be a doctor rushing a patient to the hospital, if a cop comes near us. I'll get away with it, too. I figured the hearse stunt and it worked, until Hack ruined it by speeding the dead wagon. I'll get away with the rest."

Kruger grinned again.

"You four ruffians robbed the Eastern Roller Mills tonight, after killing the watchman," True said, frowning. His mind was churning, forming plan after plan, only to reject each one as impractical. Kruger would shoot at the slightest excuse. "Miss Wales was unfortunate enough to walk past as you men were entering the hearse.

"You kidnaped her, because she would have reported seeing the hearse near the roller mills. Your plan was to transport the stolen money out of town in the hearse, then abandon the machine. Miss

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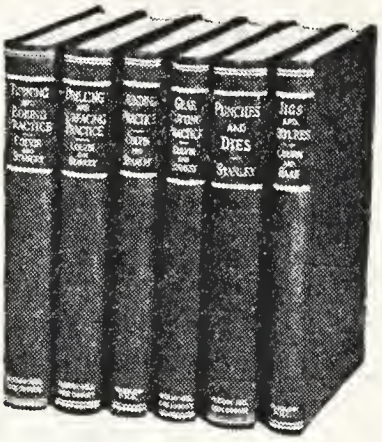

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Wales was to be murdered and her body—"

"I said you were smart, doc." Kruger nodded slowly. "You got the set-up right. Hack wrecked it by speeding the dead wagon. He was to take it easy and we were to follow slow, like we were escorting a body. The cops would have given us the green light.

"But Hack speeded and we lost him. That's why we were so late coming up with the dead wagon on the highway. I spotted the dame and tried to burn her down, but she got away in the woods. I thought I cooled you, but the slug just bounced."

Kruger wetted his lips. "You got the whole thing now. The sixty grand's in the dead wagon, but it won't be there long. As soon as Gus and Hack finish planting Willie—"

Kruger's lean shoulders lifted.

A gleam came into True's eyes. A wild and risky plan was forming in his mind. The plan offered a very slight chance of success. With a certain amount of luck—

Beside him, he heard Phoebe Wales breathing rapidly.

"But you cannot shoot Miss Wales down in cold blood!" he said quickly, sharply. "You cannot *murder* her!"

Beside him, the girl made a low, whimpering sound. Her slim legs collapsed beneath her and she crumpled, unconscious. True turned to catch her, but stopped as Kruger spoke.

"Hold it, doc! She's just fainted. She'll come out of it O. K., maybe." Kruger waggled the gun in his right hand. His eyes were bright.

"I've got an idea you did that to scare hell out of her and *make* her faint. Maybe you got some ideas about making a break. All right, try it. It won't get you anything but a slug a few minutes earlier."

"Miss Wales will undoubtedly re-

cover consciousness within a few moments." There was a professional crispness in True's voice. He could feel sweat on his face. "Miss Wales is of a highly nervous type. I expect her to scream when she recovers consciousness. A scream could be heard by someone on the highway. I can give her a sedative injection which will keep her quiet for hours. She—"

"O. K." Kruger was frowning. "Get the little black bag out of the coupé and give her the stuff. But I'm watching every move, doc. Try any funny business and I'll—" He moved the gun in his hand.

"Very well."

True turned and stepped to the side of the coupé, Kruger right behind him. He could almost feel the man's breath on the back of his neck. Leaning forward, he caught the handles of his medical bag and slid it toward him across the coupé floor boards.

Even as he did that, long, surgeon-trained fingers moved swiftly, opened the bag and slipped through the opening and moved rapidly over the orderly chaos of sphygmomanometer, stethoscope, depressors, packaged medicines, vials. He touched the smooth handle of a leather-sheathed scalpel, slipped the razor-edged instrument free.

"It will take but a moment to administer the sedative to Miss Wales," he said crisply, as he turned.

Kruger was right behind him, the gun in his right fist. True moved as though to go to the girl. Kruger turned slightly.

Abruptly, True's right hand shot out, the scalpel grasped in his fingers. He made a swift, sure stroke with the keen instrument, drawing the blade in a quick, slashing movement across the inside of Kruger's right wrist. He felt the sharp steel grate on bone.

Kruger screamed once, shrilly. His hand opened as the keen scalpel severed the flexor muscles and tendons extending through the wrist to his fingers. The gun dropped to the ground, and Kruger caught at his right wrist with his left hand as blood spurted in a gushing flood.

Carrying on almost the same movement, True struck hard with his left fist. The knuckles smashed squarely into Kruger's mouth and the man reeled backward, half unconscious with pain and shock. True struck again, with his right fist, and Kruger went down. He did not move after he struck.

"That, my dear man," True said softly, as he bent and picked Kruger's gun from the ground, "seems enough to repay you for firing a pistol at me."

"Hey, boss! What's the matter?"

Gus' hoarse voice came from the woods to True's left. He saw the huge man running into the glare of the headlights. Hack, the slim hearse driver, was behind Gus. The two men were coming through the woods toward True.

"Hey, boss!"

Gus burst into the clearing and stopped, big arms hanging almost to his knees. His mouth dropped open and he stared at True, at Kruger on the ground. Hack ran up behind him.

True leveled Kruger's gun. His experience with firearms was limited, but he knew the fundamental principles. He aimed for Gus' right kneecap and squeezed the trigger. The results were almost comical.

Gus howled suddenly, staggered and fell, his big arms thrashing wildly. Hack tripped over Gus and fell sprawling on his face.

Moving fast, True ran to them,

Kruger's gun still in his hand. Hack rolled over, his right hand clawing at his coat pocket. True whipped the barrel of Kruger's gun across the hearse driver's forehead in a quick, hard blow. Hack stopped moving.

Gus was hugging his right knee with both arms and howling with pain.

"I'm dying, doc! Do something! Help me, doc!"

True hit him with the gun barrel, hard, and Gus stopped howling. True collected both Gus' and Hack's guns. He found a third weapon, which he decided had been Willie's. With the four guns in his possession, he went back to Phoebe Wales.

Minutes later, he and Phoebe were in the driver's compartment of the big black hearse. The somber machine was following the dirt road back to the highway.

True stopped the hearse under the bright and cheerful lights of the little roadside filling station. The coveralled attendant stared at him as he went into the telephone booth and called the police.

He asked for Sergeant McCann. The time, he saw by the filling-station clock, was five minutes after eleven.

"This is Dr. Douglas True," he said precisely, as Sergeant McCann's bass roar came into the receiver. "I wish to report—"

"Doc Trouble!" McCann yelled. "Go away! Hang up! I got enough trouble without none of your screwy messes. I got a dead watchman and sixty grand missing from the Eastern Roller Mills and—"

"I wish to report the recovery of the stolen money." True talked on as if the sergeant had not spoken. "I also wish to report the capture of the ruffians who committed the deed. They are now in the hearse.

"The hearse is parked in the driveway of the filling station a short distance beyond where I was shot earlier in the evening. If you will exercise considerable haste in dispatching your myrmidons—"

"Huh?" McCann choked. "You got the dough? You got the guys? How come? How—"

"A detailed report of the experiences through which I have passed this evening, Sergeant McCann," True cut in sharply, "would involve a considerable period of time. I have no inclination to devote the time to that purpose at the moment. Suffice to say, the ruffians waited until the police left, then came back and abducted me, as well as the young lady. She—"

"You got the dame, too?" McCann bellowed. "This here Phoebe?"

"The young lady in question is here." True spoke crisply. "The ruffians are here. Unfortunately, I was compelled to sever the flexor muscles in the right wrist of—"

"Muscles!" McCann yelped. "Now it's muscles! What's muscles go to do with it? You got to tell things so a guy can understand, Doc Trouble. I— Look! Hearses, dames, guys shooting—"

"And my name, Sergeant McCann," True cut in precisely, "happens to be Dr. Douglas True, not—"

"It's Trouble!" McCann yelled. "Screwball trouble! Muscles! Yah! I'm coming!"

And the crash of Sergeant McCann's hanging up threatened ruin to the telephone receiver in True's hand. He closed his eyes, gently touched his throbbing head; but he was smiling.

Sergeant McCann always affected him like that.

THE END.

*Joe Borlund had seen some strange sights in the land of the zombis, but he never expected to see*

# DEAD MEN WALKING

## by Alan Hathway

The skipper had always said I had no more imagination than a Halloween pumpkin. According to him, even being a traffic cop taxed my think tank beyond its rated capacity.

Maybe he was right. This business about dead men walking was away over my head. Probably I was just a dumb guy whose mind couldn't take it in.

There were three of us sitting

around the screened porch of the cottage at the edge of the Haitian village when the subject came up. I'd come down on a vacation with Doc Harry Olser, the departmental sawbones. I was already worried about Olser. He'd gone off into the jungle by himself on some queer tangent of his. It was almost dusk, and he hadn't got back yet. A Haitian jungle is no place for a white man alone after dark. I'd been sitting there for half an hour, not saying much, listening to the damned drums up in the mountain —Morne-au-Diable was the name of it. You can find it on the standard maps of Haiti.

"I am not prepared to say if it is true, or no," Roi Desplaines was saying in his rich baritone. Desplaines was as black as anthracite, as big as the Emperor Jones and spoke with a French accent that was startling until you knew him. He was a native physician and had studied in France. For that matter, French is the official language of Haiti, though most of the peasants speak a Creole patois.

"Borlund thinks that the zombi is just a figment of the imagination," he said. "Myself, I do not know. And you take a counter view, M'sieu' Hammer?"

Borlund is me. Joe Borlund, just graduated from traffic duty to plain clothes and celebrating. Desplaines I've just told you about. And Karl Hammer was as perfect a contrast as you could want. He was almost as big as Desplaines, but he was of a startling, blue-eyed blondness that seemed almost iridescent in the dusk. He was square-jawed, thin-lipped and powerful. He spoke in a voice that was carefully without accent or inflection. Sort of school-bookish.

"I have always found that when nearly a million people believe something, there is some basis for it."

This sort of stuff annoyed me.

"Bunk!" I said. "A million people believed Orson Welles' Martians were invading New Jersey a couple of years ago. This zombi business is the same sort of tripe."

Somewhere up in the hills, those damned drums began beating faster as if to answer me. I fidgeted, wishing Olser would show up. I tried to tell myself that it was just the oppression of the steaming jungle dusk and the wildness of the stories we had been telling each other that made my heart beat faster. Of course, there was no truth in this zombi business. And doubly, of course, it couldn't have anything to do with Harry Olser. But those drums—

"What do the drums say?" I demanded of Desplaines. "I know they always have a message of some kind."

Desplaines shook his head. He said that he was often unable to understand them. Then he raised his voice, summoned Henri, the black yard boy who was included with the rent of the cottage. While we waited, crazy things ran through my head:

*Haitian peasants stand guard with rifles over the graves of their dead until they are certain disintegration is well under way.*

*Even the poorest of them bury their dead under solid tombs of masonry.*

*If possible, they bury a loved one right beside a busy path or highway, so that the continued presence of passers-by will keep necromancers from doing their work.*

Those things were facts. Even I knew that, from the few weeks of cramming I'd done on Haitian history and folklore. I was thinking

of them as the yard boy came in, hat in hand, and heard Desplaines' demand for an explanation of the drums. The yard boy wouldn't even look at Hammer and me.

"*C'est le culte des morts,*" he mumbled. "*Pas z'affai' blanc.*"

Desplaines translated. That meant zombis. And it meant that it was not the business of any white man. I cursed, got to my feet and went out into the garden to walk off my anger. The garden is right on the edge of the jungle. I was on the gravel path that wound around the four flowerbeds when there was a commotion in the ferns and creepers a hundred yards or so from the house.

I could hear feet racing along the path and the sound of labored panting. My .38 service revolver was in my hand before the man burst into view. Then I holstered it quickly and ran to meet him. It was the barefoot mulatto guide that Harry Olser had taken with him, and the man seemed scared half to death.

There were other running sounds before I reached him. Words in thick Creole that I couldn't understand came through the air. Also, through the air came a smooth round rock that I didn't even see. It caught me right at the base of the skull. I went down without a struggle.

I didn't go entirely out, though. There was still a dim glimmer of consciousness as I rolled, struggled back to my feet and tried to shake the cobwebs out of my brain. When I did get to Louis, the mulatto guide, I realized that the rock wasn't the only thing that had swished through the air.

A bloody machete lay beside

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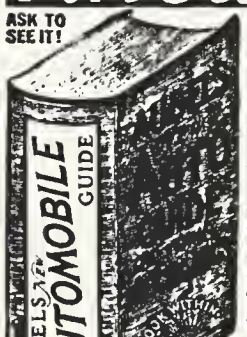


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Louis' body. The mulatto's head was twisted grotesquely, almost severed from his shoulders. Desplaines and Karl Hammer were running up behind me as I leaned over the practically decapitated Louis. One of the mulatto's hands was clenched tightly. Prying the fingers back, I found the torn end of a piece of paper.

"Must have been a message," I muttered. "A message from Harry Olser. And there isn't anything left of it to read."

The three of us stood there, silent for a moment. The drums in the hills suddenly rolled out a crescendo of sound, a menacing tympanum of fear. I didn't notice for a moment that our black yard boy was crouching there in front of us. The whites of his eyes looked like fluorescent rings against his black face. They rolled wildly in fear. Even in the gloom, I could see big sweat drops on his forehead. Fast words in Creole rushed from his lips.

*"Le blanc li p'r marcher dans mort. Une zombi blanc!"*

Desplaines translated: "The white man will walk in death. A white zombi!"

I was mad then. And probably plenty scared, though I wouldn't admit that to myself. Instinctively, I unholstered my .38, broke it and inspected the cartridges and mechanism.

"That's all tommyrot," I finally got out. "It's more likely that some murderous hillman is going to use a machete to get hold of Olser's wallet. I'm going after him."

Karl Hammer looked at me as if he was sure I'd gone crazy. His face was so pale that his blond hair seemed almost dark.

"I've been a banana planter down here for ten years," he said in that meticulous voice of his. "And I've spent a good share of my time in

these jungles. But I am not yet ready to commit suicide."

Hammer turned on his heel and went back into the screened veranda. I didn't blame him too much. Harry Olser wasn't any particular pal of Hammer's. And there are plenty of real things about a Haitian jungle at night to put the fear of the devil into a man. But then, the skipper back home had said I got promoted to being a detective because I didn't have sense enough to be cautious.

"I'm going," I repeated. "Whether anyone comes with me or not."

Huge, ebony Roi Desplaines seemed to hesitate. I wasn't at all sure of this baby. We'd only known him a week. I didn't know whether I'd feel safer with him along or without him.

"Do you know where M'sieu' Olser went?" he asked me.

All I knew was that Harry Olser had gone up the side of Morne-au-Diable, which is a jungle-covered mountain near the Dominican border. There were a couple of thatch-roofed native villages up there. And he might have gone to either one of them. I admitted the limited extent of my information to Desplaines.

"I shall go with you," he said. "At least it should be an experience."

He shuddered as he said it. If he was acting, he sure was good at it. We went back into the house and started getting ready to go. I put on dark cotton drill riding breeches and leather leggings as a protection against snakes. I supplemented my armament with a blackjack and an extra box of .38-caliber slugs. Then I was ready.

Desplaines was garbed similarly. When I came out of my room, Karl Hammer stood beside him, a worried frown on his pale face.

"I'll not go with you in this mad venture," he said stubbornly. "But I will help as much as I can. I have mules quartered here in the village."

That was a help. Hammer kept a supply of fresh mules at several points around the island. And in most of the jungle country you go by mule, if you have one, or you walk. And walking isn't too much fun. We accepted the mules gratefully.

Night had shut down like the lid on a pot when we got under way. There was just a sliver of a moon beginning to rise. We didn't have much to say to each other as we rode through the village and toward the tangled undergrowth of Morne-au-Diable. There are no roads up the side of that mountain. The few trails that exist are narrow, difficult to find and filled with thorn-bearing vines and creepers.

By tacit agreement, Desplaines took the lead. He was, after all, a native Haitian. After a few moments, he spoke.

"Why did Dr. Olser go up Morne-au-Diable?"

My answer must have sounded pretty surly. As a matter of fact, I was mad about the whole business, including Olser's junket, which I had thought pretty silly at the time that he left.

"He's heard the rumors about zombis being up there," I admitted grudgingly. "I guess he has a medical interest in the subject, or something."

Desplaines, the black physician, was pensive for a moment. When he did speak, his voice was low and tense.

"So have I," he said. "Zombiism and other forms of necromancy are

not common, in Haiti, like voodoo worship. The two should not be confused. Most of us here have encountered voodoo in one form or another. But this other thing is scarcer, and more—"

He let his voice trail off into silence. I wondered vaguely whether he was really scared himself or if he was just trying to impress me. He needn't have bothered. I wasn't admitting to myself that there was anything to this business. But I was impressed, all right. The jungle had closed over our heads like a green, leafy cavern. There were only two sounds in a world that had suddenly become fearsome and unreal. The ever-present booming of the drums changed occasionally in tempo and volume. And the hoofs of our mules thudded into the soft ground.

That went on for a couple of miles or more. Then there was a new note. A faint chanting grew steadily louder. Nearer, smaller drums blended with the greater drums up on the mountainside. Then, in an instant, the breath went out of me as if I had been kicked in the stomach.

As if the curtain had been raised on a stage, we were suddenly in a torch-lighted clearing. Half-naked blacks danced and chanted around an oblong box that was obviously a coffin. There was a black man in the coffin, the sightless glaze of death in his eyes. Before him crouched another wrinkled black man. This one wore only a loincloth and his features were painted in weird design. He leaped to his feet when we rode in, barked out something that I couldn't understand. Instantly, we were surrounded by natives who swung machetes in warning.

Roi Desplaines spoke rapidly in Creole, and the wrinkled savage answered him.

"He is Ti Mort, protector of the dead; a *bocor,* or witch doctor," Desplaines explained to me. "This man had died of jungle fever, and in the tropics there can be little delay between death and burial."

Desplaines wanted to examine the body. But sullen refusal met the suggestion. The departed was under the protection of Ti Mort and these blacks had little faith in medicine, in any event. Desplaines shrugged and began to ask questions concerning Harry Olser. I couldn't follow the Creole. But I thought I saw sly glances pass from one black to another. Presently, Desplaines bowed, whirled his mule around and beckoned for me to follow him into the jungle. I was full of questions, but he gave what he had as soon as we were out of earshot.

"They say they have heard of the white zombi," Desplaines said. "But they insist they don't know anything about Dr. Harry Olser. There are only two villages on this side of the Morne-au-Diable, and this is one of them."

I felt as if a couple of lead weights were slung over my shoulders.

"I suppose we'll have to try the other one, then?"

Desplaines shook his black head.

"I think they are trying to get rid of us," he said. "That Ti Mort is a bad *bocor*, and he is up to something."

Desplaines took a flat paper package from his pocket as he spoke and handed it to me. I opened it and found a black powder, something like lampblack.

"I thought we might need it," he told me. "Smear it on your face. You won't look like a Haitian. But neither will it be so easy to see you in the dark."

I did as he told me, feeling like an end man in a minstrel show that wasn't funny.

"Where are we going?" I asked him.

"To the funeral," Desplaines said. "The funeral may lead to Dr. Olser."

I hoped it would. And despite my practical and unimaginative mind, my spine felt as if someone were using it for a xylophone with ice cubes for hammers. Desplaines got off his mule and tied him to a tree. I followed suit, and we crept through the tangled undergrowth back toward the village. The burial party was under way.

Eight big blacks shouldered the flimsy wooden coffin. Others carried torches along a path that led up the mountain from the village. Ti Mort, the *bocor*, led the way. Everything in the village that had legs and could walk followed the coffin. An unintelligible chanting filled the air.

I started to plunge out of the thicket after them, but Desplaines gripped my shoulder in one huge hand. A protest rose in my throat, but choked there. Out of the forest, as silent as shadows, four dark figures glided after the procession. When they had passed, Desplaines motioned me to follow and padded off down the trail.

There was probably nothing more weird about that burial than there would have been about any other interment held in the dead of night by guttering torchlight in a vaulted jungle. But I don't ever again want to see any funeral under those circumstances.

Desplaines and I crouched behind the scant protection offered by climbing lianas. The four dark figures who had preceded us in following the corpse had faded into the jungle somewhere along the line. Ti Mort, the *bocor*, capered about and went through a lot of motions

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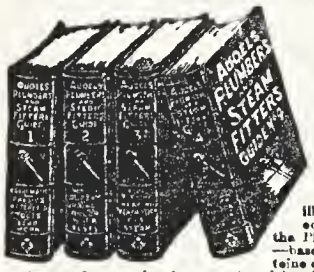


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that didn't mean anything to me. Then all but three of the burial party went back to the village. The three who stayed—relatives, I knew —carried rifles. They didn't however, have any chance to use them. The four dark figures ahead of us materialized as silently and swiftly as death itself. My first impulse was to rush out after them. But Roi Desplaines kept a tightly restraining hand on my arm.

What I saw left me weak with disbelief. Machetes glinted in the red glare of the single torch that was still burning at the side of the grave. Two of the watchers fell, great, gaping wounds in their bodies. One of them got away. But he dropped, apparently stricken by pure fright. He lay near our hiding place, half covered by tall grass. His breathing was horrible and rasping.

We could see only that the four invaders were black men. They were clad in faded denim jackets and trousers like any Haitian farmer. Moving with obviously planned precision, they found short-handled shovels hidden in the jungle and started to work on the grave. When they got the cheap pine box up on the ground, they opened it, sat the corpse bolt upright. One of them leaned over the body, while the other three chanted queerly.

Then, unsteadily and tottering, it is true, *the corpse* struggled to its feet and staggered off into the jungle! The three ghouls followed him, and then I felt the renewed pressure of Desplaines' fingers on my arm.

"After them, M'sieu' Borlund," he whispered. "Where other zombis gather, we may find the white zombi!"

We followed at a distance. The five figures ahead of us made so much noise that it was not difficult. As we went up the steep side of the

*". . . pud ub your hands!" a voice rapped at me. A modern, heavy-caliber hunting rifle was in the hands of the white man. . . .*

Morne-au-Diable, I managed to whisper questions to Desplaines.

"That zombi," I suggested. "He can't be a dead man. Probably some form of hypnosis."

Desplaines shook his head.

"I don't think so," he answered. "I didn't touch him, but I watched for signs of breathing. In a hypnotic trance it should have been sufficiently regular for me to notice it."

I started to ask him if he really believed we'd seen a corpse walking. But I changed my mind. Maybe I was afraid of what his answer would

be. In any event, sounds of activity came from the jungle ahead of us. There was a slow-tempo, dull beat of drums and the low murmur of voices. We burst into a huge, torch-lit clearing that made me gasp. There were fifty or so black workers there. They seemed to be engaged in smoothing out and leveling a great flat stretch of ground that hung, terracelike on the side of the mountain.

But it wasn't the activity of the blacks that made the flesh on my back try to crawl right up over my shoulders. It was the manner in which they were doing it. Eyes that were apparently sightless stared without any expression whatever. The movements of the black men were shuffling and mechanical, as if performed without any actual volition on the part of the individual.

I shoved the back of my hand into my mouth and tried not to groan out loud. Something seemed trying to hammer into my brain a realization that these were really dead men walking. My tortured mind kept thrusting that conclusion away. But the whole thing seemed weird and unreal. I can just remember turning to seek some solace in the presence of Roi Desplaines.

"You will shtand shdill," a voice rapped at me. "You will alzo pud ub your hands."

I realized then that Roi Desplaines was not there. And there was nothing supernatural about what I saw where he should have been. It was a modern, heavy-caliber hunting rifle and it was being gripped expertly in the hands of a white man with a white linen suit and a tropical sun helmet.

His face was indistinct, but I was sure I had never seen him before. Behind him towered a couple of huge blacks in blue denim who were not zombis. Both suspicion and hate were actively present in their eyes.

"You will durn around and march ztraighd ahead," my captor informed me. He didn't have to speak twice. Whether I believe in zombis or not, I have a healthy respect for a heavy-caliber rifle at all times.

"Ztraighd ahead" took me to the dim mouth of a cave in the side of the Morne-au-Diable. I saw that the inside was illumined by a white gasoline pressure lantern. The white man with the gun spoke to the blacks in Creole and they jumped behind me and did an effective job of binding my wrists and ankles. The white man only wasted a brief glance on me.

"Guriosity," he informed me gut-


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turally, "somedimes gills more than a gat."

With that, he left me to contemplate my cavernous prison.

I cursed Roi Desplaines. It occurred to me now that I had put him in a perfect position to lure me into a situation where my concern about the missing Harry Olser could cause no one embarrassment. I hoped fervently that if I didn't show up, Karl Hammer would turn the information over to the proper authorities—though I had no idea what they would or could do.

My host of the moment was either Dutch or German. His gutturals told me that much. But the zombi connection escaped me completely. And this apparent intensive field cultivation up in the inaccessible region of Morne-au-Diable baffled me, too.

Why anyone would need zombis—if it could be imagined that such things could be—was beyond me. Plenty of live blacks were available in Haiti to do any kind of work that was needed. Both the existence of the creatures and the desirability of using them presented questions that I couldn't answer. I gave it up and tried to see what surrounded me in the cave There were half a dozen coffinlike boxes that made me shudder. I struggled against the bonds that held me, and found them tough. My wrists were also pretty tough, however, and pretty soon they began to give.

Just about the time I was wriggling one hand free, I heard footsteps and twisted around on the floor. It was Roi Desplaines. He was stripped to the waist, his kinky hair twisted into little points, and his face was painted. In his right hand he carried a machete. I put all the strength I had into freeing my hands and tried to lunge at him. An expression of surprise crossed


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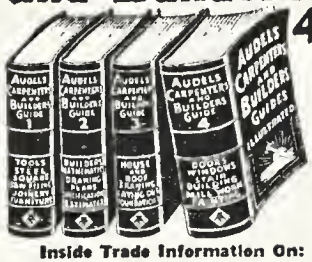

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his face. Then he put one forefinger across his lips in a gesture of silence.

"Do not be a fool," he said. "I will free you and show you something. We must get back to the coast as quickly as we can."

He dropped the machete on the floor, apparently taking my agreement for granted. It was such a complete indication of trust that I swallowed my suspicions of the man. He untied my feet and ran back to the mouth of the cave to look out. I staggered erect and started to follow him. The lid on one of the coffinlike boxes took my attention and I opened it. I saw there the pale, still face of Doc Harry Olser, my vacationing companion and home-town police surgeon!

My shout brought Desplaines back from the mouth of the cave. Instinctively, I put out a hand to touch Harry Olser's cheek. It was cold and leathery and showed no sign of life that I could determine. The eyes were open, staring sightlessly upward, entirely devoid of any sign of recognition or life. Desplaines pulled me away.

"Come," he said. "There is nothing that we can do here now. If you wish to save him, come with me."

It didn't make any sense to me. But my mind was plenty foggy anyway by then. I stumbled out into the night after the black physician, followed him across that strange level plane. Automaton blacks worked with mechanical motions on the terrain over which we ran. The only light came from guttering torches. Approximately in the center of the field, Desplaines stopped me. He pointed alternately at two dark clumps that looked in the gloom like piles of rock. They were a couple of hundred yards apart.

"There are men in each place with guns," Desplaines said. "We must separate here. One of us must surprise them and seize guns. I will take the one on the right."

With that he was gone. I crept toward the shadowy clump on the left. I circled and got close to the edge of the jungle, knowing that there was greater chance of concealment there. I was only a couple of dozen yards away from my destination when the lights went on. And right there in a flash I saw what work was really being done.

The lights were acetylene reflector floodlights, and they gave the place a semblance of day. I saw behind the gun nest in front of me a gaping lip in the side of the Morne-au-Diable. I recognized it from pictures I had seen in magazines—the type of concealed airdrome that European powers had developed in the war, invisible from the air and virtually bombproof as well. I remembered the guttural accents of my white captor, and the rest of it all dropped into little slots like a puzzle nearing completion.

All but the zombis.

And I forgot about them when the machine guns began stuttering. I was flat on my face in the high grass at the edge of the jungle then. I guess the boys on my side were just practicing. It was a cinch they couldn't see me. After the first burst, a yell went up from the other side. The gunmen in the nest nearest me forgot the field and turned toward that other emplacement on the other side. I saw a steel blade flash briefly. There was a scream. And then Roi Desplaines' huge form loomed there, a submachine gun cradled in his arms. He brought the Tommy-gun up just as the boys in front of me started to cut loose. Desplaines' gun mowed them down.

He seemed to be in command of the situation. But only for a moment. Three figures scurried out from the gash in the mountainside that apparently was a concealed airplane hangar. One of them was evidently my captor of an hour or so ago. Ti Mort, the bad *bocor*, was right behind him. But the third made me start cursing all over again. It was tall and blond Karl Hammer, my erstwhile companion who had said he was merely a banana planter!

There was a narrow ledge of rock that protruded from the hillside near the farther edge of the excavated hangar. Ti Mort stopped just before he reached it, just out of the range of Roi Desplaines' Tommy-gun. He spread out both hands then and stopped Karl Hammer and his guttural-voiced companion. Then Ti Mort began to yell in Creole. He yelled at the automatons who were in the field. I couldn't understand the words. But the fact that they were a command was obvious.

I swung around and watched them. Dead-eyed blacks dropped rakes and shovels. They swung in a solid, dead line and began marching toward Roi Desplaines!

It was a terrible thing to watch. One thing that helped to make it so was Desplaines' own hesitation. There were fifty or so of those mindless monsters out there. It is probable that Desplaines could have mowed them all down with his Tommy-gun. But he didn't. He just stood there, an expression of awful horror on his face.

Fortunately, everyone else in the place was watching him, too. It was almost too late when I tumbled to the opportunity that gave me. Desplaines had cleaned out the

machine-gun nest in front of me. I got to it in a single jump and scooped up a Tommy-gun for purposes of my own. I didn't aim it at the slowly, mechanically advancing zombis. I swung it toward Karl Hammer and his pals. My first burst was intentionally low. It's hard to shoot to kill when your victims don't even know you're there. Karl Hammer whipped out a heavy automatic that looked like a Luger .45. He *whammed* out with it and lead whistled too close to my head for comfort.

I didn't let my conscience bother me on the second burst. Hammer dropped his Luger and slumped to the ground. He was all through with shooting. Permanently.

The guttural-voiced guy let out a scream. He ran into the cavern-hangar, leaving Ti Mort to his zombis. I was racing over the ground by then. But the distance was pretty great. I heard the growl of an inertia starter and a motor barked into life, began presently to roar. A low-wing monoplane shot out of the hangar and roared over the field so close to the advancing marchers that I was afraid some of them would be chopped up by the propeller. He missed them, though, and I could see him yank the stick back for a quick take-off. It proved to be too quick.

The plane took off all right. But the motor hadn't had time enough to warm up. Under the strain of full throttle, it faltered, coughed and died. The trim ship nosed down suddenly, plummeted to the ground and burst into flame.

That certainly took care of that angle. I could feel the heat of it a thousand yards away. I turned back then, just in time to see Roi Desplaines solve a problem of necromancy in Haiti. He didn't use the Tommy-gun. He used the machete, and he took Ti Mort's head off as neatly as you could snip the end off of a five-cent cigar. Then he looked at the slowly marching men. He began to bark orders in Creole. And they stopped.

When I got to him, he didn't look scared any more. Just sort of sad and unhappy. I jerked a thumb toward the zombis and asked him what he was going to do with them.

"They aren't zombis," Desplaines said. "They are merely men who were taken sick with fever and who were helped along with *atropa belladonna*, principally atropine. It reduces pulse and breathing to a negative point where a layman could be convinced of death. Chills frequently set in, reducing body temperature. These men can probably be restored to normalcy by the administration of amyl nitrate inhalation and opium injection, the medical antidote for atropine. This is probably also true with your friend, M'sieu' Olser."

There isn't much more. It turned out that Desplaines was right about both the black men and Harry Olser. It took Harry a little time to recover sufficiently to go back home. And we spent most of it with Desplaines. We found that Hammer had been a foreign agent planning a concealed air base within easy striking distance of Southern United States and that the zombi business was used for two reasons. It kept other curious natives off of Morne-au-Diable. And zombi natives whom they used could be conveniently disposed of so that talk of the hidden air base would not get back to Cap Haitien or Port-au-Prince. No one would miss them. They were officially dead and buried anyway.

I felt much eased. I said so to

Desplaines the night before Harry Olser and I were to sail for home.

"I knew that zombi business was a fake," I said. "There couldn't be such things."

Desplaines smiled in an odd sort of way. He handed me a book with a paragraph marked in red.

"Perhaps," he said. "And perhaps zombis are not always fakes created by a subtle poison. There may be some more sinister reason for this strange section of Haiti's penal code. It appears that those who rise from the grave may often be dead, both officially and actually."

I thought it was a joke at first. But I read the paragraph.

Article 249. If, after the administering of any substance which produces a lethargic coma, the person is buried, the act shall be considered *murder no matter what result follows.*

Maybe it doesn't mean anything so terribly sinister. I don't know. I only know that it is a part of Haiti's penal code. And I don't know of any other part of the world that officially admits the existence of the dead-alive.

I was glad to get aboard the boat.

THE END.

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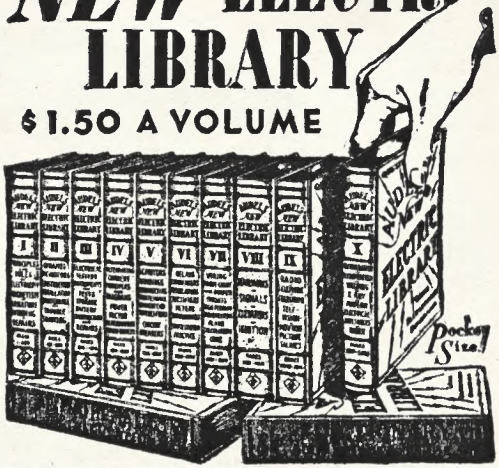


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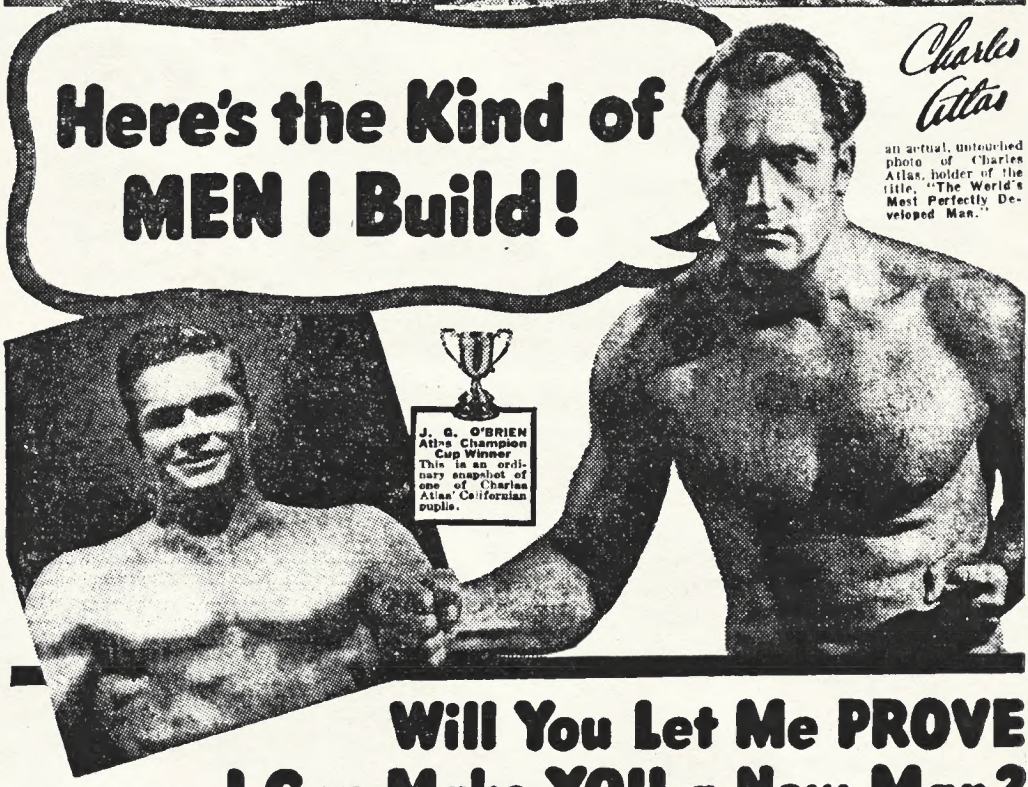
Charles Atlas
an actual, untouched photo of Charles Atlas, holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."
J. G. O'BRIEN
Atlas Champion Cup Winner
This is an ordinary snapshot of one of Charles Atlas' Californian pupils.

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No "ifs," "ands," or "maybes." Just tell me where you want handsome, powerful muscles. Are you fat and flabby? Or skinny and gawky? Are you short-winded, pepless? Do you hold back and let others walk off with the prettiest girls, best jobs, etc.? Then write for details about **"Dynamic Tension"** and learn how I can make you a healthy, confident, powerful HE-MAN.

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